

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and

Science Fiction



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OCTOBER

LETTER TO A TIGER
Kay Rogers

PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

ARTHUR PORGES

BOUL ANDERSON

RAYMOND CHANDLER

A selection of the best stories of fantasy and science fiction, new and old

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 5, No. 4

OCTOBER

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(from Letter to a Tiger, by Kay Rogers)

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It's only a little over a year since the magazine publication of Philip José Farmer's novel THE LOVERS stirred up more excitement and controversy among readers than any other science fiction debut in recent memory. In the brief time since then, Mr. Farmer has arranged for hardcover publication of THE LOVERS, won a prize contest with his second novel, and sold stories to a flock of magazines and anthologies. His first appearance in F&SF indicates, we think, why his career has begun so auspiciously and promises to continue so rewardingly: He is interested in unusual and provocative thinking, off the jet-beaten paths of the spaceways, and he knows how to present that thinking in the human story-terms of believable characters. Here are real problems of the future — the relation of man to other cultures, to the laws of chance, and to God — faced by two very real and memorable people: a psychokinetic gambler and a humble priest.

Attitudes

by PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

ROGER TANDEM CROUCHED behind his pinochle hand as if he were hiding behind a battery of shields. His eyes ran like weasels over the faces of the other players, seated around a table in the lounge of the interstellar liner, *Lady Luck*.

"Father John," he said, "I've got you all figured out. You'll be nice to me, you'll crack jokes, and you'll play pinochle with me, though not for money, of course. You'll even have a beer with me. And, after I begin thinking you're a pretty good guy, you'll lead me gradually to this and that topic. You'll approach them at an angle, slide away when I get annoyed or alarmed, but always circle back. And then, all of a sudden, when I'm not watching, you'll jerk the lid off hell's flames and invite me to take a look. And you think I'll be so scared I'll jump right back under the wing of Mother Church."

Father John raised his light blue eyes long enough from his cards to say, mildly, "You're right about the last half of your last sentence. As to the rest, who knows?"

"You're smart, Father, with this religious angle. But you'll get no

place with me. Know why? It's because you haven't the right attitude."

The eyebrows of the other five players rose as high as they could get. The captain of the *Lady Luck*, Rowds, coughed until he was red in the face and then, sputtering and blowing into a handkerchief, said, "Hang it all, Tandem, what — ah — do you mean by saying that — ah — *he* hasn't got the right attitude?"

Tandem smiled as one who is very sure of himself and replied, "I know you're thinking I've a lot of guts to say that. Here's Roger Tandem, a professional gambler and a collector — and seller — of interstellar *objets d'art*, reproaching a padre. But I've got more to add to that. I not only do not think Father John has the right attitude, I don't think any of you gentlemen have."

Nobody replied. Tandem's lips curved to approximate a sneer, but his fellow-players could not see them because he held his cards in front of his mouth.

"You're all more or less pious," he said. "And why? Because you're afraid to take a chance, that's why. You say to yourself that you're not sure there's life beyond this one, but there just might be. So you decide it's playing safe if you hitch a ride aboard one or another religion. None of you gentlemen belong to the same one, but you all have this in common. You think you have nothing to lose if you profess to believe in this or that god. On the other hand, if you deny one, you might lose out altogether. So, why not profess? It's safer."

He laid his cards down and lit up a cigarette and quickly blew smoke out so it formed a veil before his face.

"I'm not afraid to take a chance. I'm betting big stakes. My so-called eternal soul against the belief that there is nothing beyond this life. Why should I always *not* do what I want to and thus make myself miserable and hypocritical, when I can enjoy myself thoroughly?"

"That," said Father John Carmody, "is where you may be making a mistake. My opinion is that *you* have the wrong attitude. All of us are betting in a game where there is only one way in which we *can* win. That is by faith. But your method of placing your stakes is not, from my viewpoint, the sensible one. Even if you should be proved correct, you would not know it. How would you collect your wager?"

"I collect it while I live, Father," said Tandem. "That's enough for me. When I'm dead, I won't worry about anyone welshing on me. And I might point out, Father, that you had better have more luck with your faith than you do with your cards. You're not a very good player, you know."

The priest smiled. His round pudgy face was not at all handsome, but, when he was amused, he looked pleasant and likeable. You got the impres-

sion he had a tuning fork inside him, and it was shaking him with a mirth he invited you to share.

Tandem liked it except when the laughter seemed to be at his expense. Then his mouth curved into the expression it so often took when his cards hid it.

At that moment a loud voice came over the intercom, and a yellow light began flashing above the entrance to the lounge room. Captain Rowds rose and said, "Ah, pardon me, gentlemen. The — ah — pilot-room wants me. We're about to come out of Translation. Don't forget that we'll be — ah — in free fall as soon as the red light comes on."

The hand was not finished. The cards were put away in a box whose magnetized side would cling to an iron panel set in the table. The players leaned back to wait until the *Lady Luck* came out of Translation and went into free fall for a period of ten minutes while the automatic computer took its bearings.

If they had emerged from no-space at the desired point, they would then continue to their destination by normal space-drive.

Tandem looked around the lounge and sighed. Pickings had been slim during this trip. Most of his time had been spent playing for fun with Father John, Captain Rowds, the Universal Light missionary, and the two sociology professors. It was too bad his companions had no money and thought of themselves as gentlemen. Had they played for keeps, they would have been offended if anyone had insisted on suspending a PK or ESP indicator above the cardtable. And Tandem would, then, have had no second thoughts about using either of those talents. He reasoned that they had been given to him for a purpose. The question of from whom they had come did not shadow his mind.

He'd made some money during the hop from B Velorum to Y Scorpii when he had struck up an acquaintance with a rich young dice-enthusiast, the type who was insulted if you set an alarm on the floor. He was a *real* gambler. That is, he understood that one PKer could detect when another was using energies supposedly forbidden during a game. But he also understood that, nowadays, one of the most exciting risks was that of running up against somebody who might be as good as you. Or better.

Whatever happened, when two of the "talented" were in a game with a group of non-PKers, neither would divulge that the other was a cheater. Then it became a duel between the two who thought of themselves as the "aristocrats" of gambling. The plebs were left outside in the cold, and possessed neither wisdom nor money at the game's end.

Tandem had had the edge with the rich young man. But, just when he had jockeyed him to the verge of making some big bets, the *Lady Luck*

(a misnamed vessel if ever there was one!) had Translated outside their destination, the game had ended, and the sucker had left shortly after.

Now, he was not only getting close to broke, he was, far worse, bored. Even the long argument with Father John — if you could call anything so mild such — no longer titillated him. And now, perhaps, it was that failure to be excited and the vague feeling that the padre had gotten the better of him that made him do what he did. For, as the red light began flashing and the intercom warned the passengers to watch themselves, Tandem unbuckled the belt that held him to the chair. He pushed himself upwards with a slight tap of his foot. As he floated towards the ceiling, he put his hands to his lips in an attitude of prayer and adopted an expression that was a marvelous blend of silliness and saintliness.

"Hey, Father John!" he called. "Look! Joseph of Cupertino!"

There were embarrassed looks and a few nervous laughs from the loungers. Even the apostle of the Universal Light, though the padre's competitor, frowned at what he thought was very bad taste and, in a way, a slight upon his own beliefs.

"Wrong attitude," he muttered, "definitely the wrong attitude."

Father John blinked once before he saw that Tandem was parodying the difficulties that a famous medieval saint had had with involuntary levitations. Far from being offended, however, he calmly took a notebook from his pocket and began writing in it. No matter what the event, he tried to profit from it. Even the devil must be thanked for giving examples. Tandem's antics had inspired him with an idea for an article. If he finished it in time and got it off on a mail-ship, he might have it published in the next issue of his order's periodical.

It would be titled *The Free Fall of Man: Down or Up?*

II

Tandem had been briefly tempted to get off at the next stop, Wildenwooly. It was a virgin planet that offered much work to its settlers and very few avenues of amusement. Gambling was one. But the trouble with Wildenwooly was that it also did not have many men who had any really big money, and that all were pathologically quick to take offense. Tandem's luck might make them suspicious and, if an indicator were available, it might be used. Nor would it help him much to damp out his powers. The result would be just as extraordinary a streak of bad luck.

Everybody had some PK. The indicators were set too high to register the average energy. Tandem and men like him could not consistently key their output to the normal man's unless they kept a rigid control. And almost always they would get excited during a game, or succumb to temptation,

and use an abnormal amount. The result would be their exposure. So, to avoid that, they had to suppress their talent completely. This ended in just as much suspicion. And, while the Woolies could not *prove* that he had been cheating, they might follow their habit of taking the law into their own hands.

As Tandem didn't relish beatings or being ridden out of town on a rail — an unlovely revival of an old American custom — he decided he would stick to the *Lady Luck* until she arrived at Po Chü-I. That was a planet full of Celestials whose pockets bulged with Federation credits and whose eyes were bright with the gleam of their ancient passion for Dame Fortune.

Before the liner got to Po Chü-I, it stopped off at Weizmann and picked up another rich young man. Tandem rubbed his hands and took the sucker for all he could. This was the beauty of the technological age. No matter what the scientific advances, you could find the same old type of human being begging to be fleeced. The rich young man and he located several others who would play with them until the stakes got too high. Tandem's former partners, the captain, the professors, and the two reverends were ignored while he piled up the chips. Unfortunately, just after they took off from Po Chü-I, the rich young man became sullen, argued with him about something unconnected with the gambling, and gave him a black eye.

Tandem did not strike back. He told the rich young man that he would file suit against him in an Earth court for having violated his free will. He had not given anybody permission to strike him. Moreover, he would submit willingly to an injection of Telol. Questioning under the influence of that drug would reveal that he had not been cheating.

For some reason he did not understand, nobody except Father John would speak to Tandem the rest of the trip. And Tandem did not care to talk to the padre. He swore he'd get off at the next stop regardless of what type of world it was.

The *Lady Luck* balked him by setting down upon a planet that was terra incognita as far as Earthmen were concerned. No human settlements had been made there at all. The only reason the liner landed was the need of water to refill its fuel tanks.

Captain Rowds announced to the crew and passengers that they might step out upon the soil of Kubeia and stretch their legs. But they were not to venture beyond the other side of the lake.

"Ah — ladies and gentlemen — ah — it so happens that the Federation Sociological Agent has — ah — made an agreement with the aborigines whereby we may use this area. But we are not to enter into any traffic with the — ah — Kubeians themselves. These people have many peculiar institutions which we — ah — Terrans might offend through — if you will

pardon that expression — ignorance. And some of their customs are — ah — if I may so express it, rather — ah — beastly. A word to the wise is — ah — sufficient.”

Tandem found out that the ship would take at least four hours for re-filling. Therefore, he reasoned, if he cared to do a little exploring, he would have more than enough time. He was determined to get at least a slight view of Kubeia. Their situation inside a little forest-covered valley forbade that. If he were to climb a hill and then a tree, he could see the city of the natives, whose white buildings he had glimpsed from the porthole as the ship sank towards this alien soil. He had no particular interest, really, except that the captain had forbidden it. That, to Tandem, was equal to a command. Even as a child, he had always taken a delicious delight in disobeying his father. And, as an adult, he would not bow to authority.

Head bent slightly downwards, his hand stroking his chin and mouth, he sauntered around the other side of the gigantic liner. There was no one there to order him back. He stepped up his pace. And, at the same time, he heard a voice.

“Wait for me! I’ll go with you a way!”

He turned. It was Father John.

Tandem tensed. The priest was smiling, his light blue eyes beaming. And that was the trouble. Tandem did not trust this man because he was altogether too inconsistent. You couldn’t predict his behavior. One minute he was smooth as a banana peel; the next, rough as a three-day beard.

The gambler dropped his hand to reveal his half-smile, half-sneer:

“If I ask you to go with me a mile, Father, you must, according to your belief, go with me at least two miles.”

“Gladly, son, except that the captain has forbidden it. And, I presume, with good cause.”

“Look, Father, what possible harm could come from just sneaking a glance outside? The natives think this area is tabu. They won’t bother us. So, why not take a little walk?”

“There is no good reason to disregard the captain. He has complete temporal jurisdiction over the ship, which is his little world. He knows his business; I respect his orders.”

“O.K., Father, wrap yourself up in your little robe of submission. You may be safe in it, but you’ll never see or enjoy anything outside it. As for me, I’m going to take a chance. Not that it’ll be much of one.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“Look, Father, get that woeful expression off your face. I’m just going up the hill a little ways and climb a tree. Then I’m coming right back down. Anything wrong with that?”

"You know whether or not there is."

"Sure, I do," said Tandem, speaking through his fingers, now held over his mouth. "It all depends on your attitude, Father. Walk boldly, be unafraid, don't hide from anything or anybody, and you'll get out of life just what you put in it."

"I'll agree with you that you get out of life just what you put in it. But as to the former part of your statement, I disagree. You're not walking boldly. You're afraid. You're hiding."

Tandem had turned to stride away, but he halted and spun back.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you feel you must hide from someone or something all the time. Otherwise, why do you always cover your lips with your hand, or, if not with that, with a shield of playing cards? And when you are forced to expose your face, then you twist your mouth into a rictus of contempt for the world. Why?"

"Now it's psychiatry!" snarled Tandem. "You stay here, Father, stuck in your little valley. I'm going to see what the rest of Kubeia has to offer."

"Don't forget. We leave in four hours."

"I have a watch," said Tandem, and he laughed and added, "I'll let it be my conscience."

"Watches run down."

"So do consciences, Father."

Still laughing, Tandem walked off. Halfway up the hill, he paused to peer back between the trees. Father John was standing there, watching, a lone and little black figure. But he must have turned a trifle at just the right angle, for the sun flashed on the crescent of white collar and struck Tandem in the eyes. He blinked and cursed and lit a cigarette and felt much better as the blue curtain drifted up past his face. There was nothing like a good smoke to relax a man.

III

It might have been said of Tandem that he had been looking all his life for black sheep to fleece. Nor did he have any trouble finding them now.

From his spy-post near the top of a great tree, he could look down into the next valley. And there he could see the black sheep. Even on Kubeia.

There was no mistaking the purpose of the crowd gathered in two concentric rings at the bottom of the hill. There was the smaller circle of men inside, all on their knees and regarding intently some object in their center. And behind them stood a greater number of people, also watching intently the thing that resembled, as near as he could tell, a weathercock. Obviously, it wasn't that. He could tell from the attitudes of those around it what its

purpose was. And his heart leaped. There was no mistake. He was able to smell a crap game a mile away. This might be a slightly different form than the Terran type, but its essence was the same.

Hastily, he climbed down the tree and began threading through the trunks that covered this hill. A glance at his wrist watch showed him he had three and a half hours left. Moreover, it was inconceivable that Captain Rowds would set off without his passenger. Tandem had to watch this Kubeian game of chance. He wouldn't enter it, of course, because he didn't know the rules and had no local currency with which to buy his way in. He'd just observe a while and then leave.

His heart beat fast; his palms grew moist. This was what he lived for, this tension and uncertainty and excitement. Take a chance. Win or lose. Come on, cubes, roll Daddy a natural!

He grinned to himself. What was he thinking of? He couldn't possibly get into the fun. And there was the possibility that the Kubeians would be so upset by the appearance of an Earthman that the game would break up. He doubted that, though. Gamblers were notoriously blasé. Nothing but cataclysm or the police could tear them away as long as there was money yet to win.

Before he revealed himself, he examined the players. Humanoid, they had brown skins, round heads covered with short coarse auburn hairs, triangular faces innocent of whiskers except for six semi-cartilaginous bristles on their long upper lips, black noses like boxing gloves, black leathery lips, sharp meat-eater's teeth, and well developed chins. A ruff of auburn hairs grew like a boa around their necks.

All were dressed in long black coats and white knee-length breeches. Only one wore a hat. This native seemed to be a ringmaster of some sort, or, as Tandem came to think of him, the Croupier. He was taller and thinner than the others and wore a miter with a big green eyeshade. He stood on one spot, arbitrated disputes about bets, and gave the signal for each play to start. It was the Croupier, Tandem realized, who would govern the temper of the crowd towards the newcomer.

He breathed deeply, adopted the familiar rictus, and stepped out from behind the bush.

He had been right about the attitudes of the Kubeians toward strangers. Those on the outer fringe looked up, widened their somewhat slanting eyes, and pricked up their foxlike ears. But, after glances that assured them he was harmless, they returned to the game. Either they were following a cultural pattern of feigning indifference, or they actually were as adaptable as they seemed to be. Whatever their reasons, he decided to profit by them.

He gently tried to work his way through the throng of spectators and

found them quite willing to step aside. Before long he was in the front row. He looked squarely at the Croupier, who gave him an enigmatic but searching glance, and then raised both hands above his head. Two of his four fingers on each hand were crossed. The crowd gave a single barking cry and imitated his gesture. Then the Croupier dropped his hands; the game went on as if the Terran had always been there. Tandem, after a moment's shrewd study, was convinced that he had found his element and that this was nothing other than a glorified version of Spin-the-Milk-Bottle.

The center of attention was a six-foot-long statue of a Kubeian. Its two arms were extended at right angles on either side, and its legs were held straight out on a line with its body. It was face downward and whirled freely upon its navel, which was stuck on a rod whose other end was cemented firmly into a large block of marble.

The figure's head was painted white. Its legs were black. One arm was red; the other, green. The body was a steel gray.

Tandem's heart accelerated. The statue, he was sure, was platinum.

He watched. A player took hold of one of the arms and crooned a liturgy to it in his exotic tongue, a chant whose tones matched exactly those used by a pleading Terran before he casts his dice. Then, after a signal from the Croupier, he gave the arm a vigorous shove. The figure spun around and around, the sun glancing off it in red and green and black and white and silver flashes. When it began to slow down, the players crouched in breathless anticipation or else held out their arms to it and pleaded invocations that were Galaxy-wide, no matter what the language.

Meanwhile, both the players and the spectators were making side bets. Each had one or more smaller duplicates of the central statue. As it whirled around, they gesticulated at each other, chattered, then tossed their figures up in the air so they revolved around and around. Tandem was sure these statuettes were of platinum, also.

The spinning figure stopped. Its green arm pointed at one of the players. A cry went up from the crowd. Many stepped forward and piled their figurines before the man. He gave the Whirligig — as Tandem now called it — another shove. Again, it spun around and around.

The Earthman had now analyzed the game. You took one of your little whirligigs and tossed it in the air. If one of its limbs or its head sunk into the soft earth, and it happened to be the same color as the big Whirligig's extension when it pointed to you, you collected the statuettes that had landed upon extensions of a different color.

If the Whirligig singled you out, but your statuette had sunk an indicator of another color into the earth, you neither lost nor won but got another try. Otherwise, the person next in line tried his luck.

Tandem rubbed his mental hands. He showed his watch to a neighbor and indicated he'd like to trade it for a whirligig. The naïve native, after getting the high sign from the Croupier, readily accepted and seemed quite pleased that he was several thousand credits the loser.

Tandem made several side bets and won. Armed with the whirligigs, he boldly pushed into the inner ring. Once there he coolly exerted his PK to slow the big Whirligig down and stop it at just the right person and on just the right color. He was clever enough not to have it indicate him over a few times; most of his rapidly building fortune was made on side bets. Sometimes, he lost on purpose; sometimes, by chance. He was sure that many of the Kubeians had an unconscious PK that was bound to work for them if enough happened to concentrate on the same color. He could detect little spots of emanations here and there but could not localize them. They were lost in the general shuffle.

It did not matter. The natives would not have his trained talents.

He forgot about that and watched the temper of the crowd. He'd been alone among aliens and had seen them turn ugly when he began to win too steadily. He was ready to start losing so they would cool off, or, if that didn't work, to run. How he expected to make any speed with the weight of his winnings dragging him down, he didn't stop to think. But he was sure that, somehow, he'd come out ahead.

Nothing that he waited for came to pass. The natives lost none of their vaguely vulpine grins, and their rusty-red eyes seemed sincerely friendly. When he won, he was slapped on the back. Some even helped him pile up his whirligigs. He kept an eye on them to make sure they didn't conceal any under their long fuzzy black coats, so much like a Terran preacher's. But, nobody tried to steal.

The afternoon whirled by dizzily in flashing greens and reds and whites and silvers and dull blacks. Not too obviously, the whirligigs at his feet began to build to a small mountain.

Outwardly cool, he was inwardly intoxicated. He was not so far gone that he did not glance occasionally at the watch strapped around the hairy wrist of the Kubeian he had traded it to. Always, he saw that he had plenty of time left to make another killing.

Busy as he was, he noticed also that the crowd of spectators was increasing. This game was like any game of chance anywhere. Let somebody get hot and, through some psychological grapevine that could not be explained, everybody in the neighborhood heard of it. Natives by the dozens were loping through narrow passes into the little valley, pushing the watchers closer to the players, chattering loudly, whistling, applauding with strange barking cries, and building up a mighty stench under the hot sun with the

accumulation of sweaty, hairy bodies. Slanting rusty-red eyes gleamed; sharp pointed ears waggled; the auburn hairs of the neckruffs stood up; long red tongues with green bulb-tips licked the thin black-leather lips; everywhere, hands lifted to the skies in a peculiar gesture, each with two of its four fingers crossed.

Tandem did not mind. He had heard — and smelled — crowds like this before. When he was winning, he reveled in it.

Let the Whirligig spin! Let the statuettes soar! And let the wealth pile up at his feet! This was living. This was what even drink and women could not do for him!

There came a time when only four natives were left with any whirligigs before them. It was Tandem's turn to spin. He threw his figurine high up, saw it land with its black legs stuck into the soft earth, and stepped forward to give the big figure a whirl. He shot a side-glance at the Croupier and saw tears brightening the rusty eyes.

Tandem was surprised, but he did not try to guess what caused this strange emotion. All he wanted to do was to play, and he had the go-ahead from the native.

But as he laid his hands upon the hard green arm, he heard a cry that shot above the roar of the mob, stilled it, and seized him so he could make no move.

It was Father John's voice, and he was shouting, "Stop, Tandem! For the love of God, *stop!*"

IV

"What the hell are you doing here?" snarled Tandem. "Are you trying to queer the deal?"

"I've come the second mile, son," said Father John. "And a good thing for you, too. One more second, and you would have been lost."

Streams of sweat ran down his heavy jowls into his collar, now turning gray with dirt and perspiration. A branch must have raked a three-fingered red furrow across his cheek.

His blue eyes vibrated to the tuning fork deep-buried within his rotund body, but the note was not that of mirth.

"Step back, Carmody," said Tandem. "This is the last spin. Then I'm coming back. Rich!"

"No, you won't. Listen, Tandem, we haven't much time : : : !"

"Get out of the way! These people might want to take advantage of this and stop the game!"

Father John threw a despairing look towards the sky. At the same time the Croupier left the spot on which he had stood during the game, and ad-

vanced with his hand held out towards the padre. Hope replaced despair on Father John's face. Eagerly, he began making a series of gestures directed at the Croupier.

Tandem, though exasperated, could do little else than watch and hope that the meddling officious priest would be sent packing. It irritated him almost to weeping to have complete victory so close and now see it destroyed by this long-nosed puritan.

Father John paid no attention to Tandem. Having snared the Croupier's wet and rusty-red eyes, he then pointed to himself and to Tandem and indicated a circle around them. The Croupier did not change expression. Undaunted at this, Father John then pointed his finger at the natives and described a circle around them. He repeated the maneuvers twice. Abruptly, the slanting eyes widened; the rusty-red gleamed. He rotated his head swiftly, an action which seemed to be his equivalent of nodding yes. Apparently he understood that the padre was indicating that the two humans were in a different class from the Kubeians.

Father John then stabbed his index finger at the Whirligig and followed that by pointing at the Croupier. Again the circle was drawn, this time clearly circumscribing the native and the face-downward statue. Then another circle around the two Earthmen. After which, Father John held up the crucifix hung from his neck so that all could clearly see it.

A single-throated cry rose from the mob. Somehow it held tones of disappointment, not surprise. They pressed forward, but at a bark from the Croupier, they fell back. He himself came forward and eagerly inspected the symbol. When he was done, he looked at Father John for further signs. Tears streamed from his eyes.

"What're you doing, Carmody?" said Tandem harshly. "Is it going to hurt you if I win something valuable?"

"Quiet, man, I've almost got it through their heads. We may be able to call off the game yet. I don't know, though, you're so deep in it now."

"When I get back to Earth or the nearest big port, I'll sue you for interfering with my free will!"

He knew that was an idle threat, for the law would not apply to this case. But it made him feel better to express it.

Father John had not heard him, anyway. He was now struck into the attitude of a crucifixion, arms straight out, legs together, and an agonized expression on his face. As soon as he saw the Croupier rotate his head in comprehension, the padre pointed again at Tandem. The Croupier looked startled; his black boxing-glove nose twitched with some unknown emotion. He shrugged his shoulders in a gesture that could only be interpreted in a Gallic fashion, and he lifted his hands up, palms turned upwards.

Father John smiled; his whole body seemed to hum with the invisible tuning fork inside him. This time, it was a note of relaxation.

"You were lucky, my boy," he said to Tandem, "that, shortly after you left, I remembered an article I had read in the *Interstellar Journal of Comparative Religions*. This one was written by an anthropologist who had spent some time here on Kubeia, and . . ."

The Croupier interrupted with some vigorous signs. Evidently Father John had mistaken his meaning.

The priest's lips and jowls sagged, and he groaned, "This fellow has heard of free will, too, Tandem. He insists that you make up your own mind as to whether you care to . . ."

Tandem did not wait to hear the rest but gave a glad shout.

"Gentlemen, on with the game!"

He scarcely heard the padre's cry of protest as he seized the Whirligig's green arm and gave it a shove that sent it around and around upon its navel. Nor could he have heard any more from Father John, so rapt was he in waiting for the moment when it would slow down to the point where he could begin to exert the tiny shoves or pushes that would bring the black legs pointing straight at him.

Around and around it went, and while it spun, the statuettes of the side-betters flashed in the sun. Fortunes were made or lost among the natives. Tandem stood motionless in a half-crouch, smug in the knowledge that he was not going to lose. The four who faced him did not, individually or collectively, have what he had on the ball. See! Here the Whirligig came, slow, slow, coming around for one more turn. The green arm swept by, then the legs passed him. A little push, a little push would bring them back in their circle, then a small pull, a small pull to keep their speed, and finally, a fraction of a shove to halt them entirely.

This is the way they go. Here they come, long and black with the stylized feet stuck out in the same plane as the legs. Here they come, whoa, whoa, gently, gently . . . aah!

Hah!

The crowd, which had been holding its breath, released it in a mighty burst, a howl of surprise and disappointment.

And Tandem was still frozen in his crouch, his mind not believing what his eyes saw, and the hairs on the back of his neck prickling as he detected the sudden and irresistible power that had leapt out and swung the legs enough to miss him and make the green arm point at one of his opponents.

It was Father John who shook him and said, "Man, come on. You're wiped out."

Numbly, Tandem watched the weeping Croupier signal to natives who

swarmed over his pile of figurines and carted them across the circle to the winner. Now, though he had not realized it, the rules had changed. It was winner take all.

Before they could go, the Croupier stepped up to the padre and handed him one of the statuettes. Father John hesitated, then lifted the chain from around his neck and handed the crucifix to him.

"What's that for?"

"Professional courtesy," said the padre as he steered Tandem by the elbow through the mob of wildly howling and leaping Kubeians. "He's a good man. Not the least jealous."

Tandem did not try to decipher that. His rage, sizzling beneath the crust of numbness, broke loose.

"Damn it, those natives were hiding the power of their PK! But, even so, they'd not have been able to catch me off balance if you hadn't stopped the game when you did and allowed them to gang up on me! It was only pure chance that they happened to be working together! If you hadn't been such a puritanical dog-in-the-manger, I'd have won for sure! I'd be rich! Rich!"

"I take full responsibility. Meanwhile, allow me to ex — Oops, watch it!"

Tandem stumbled and would have fallen flat on his face if Father John had not caught him. Tandem recovered and was angrier than before. He wanted to owe the padre absolutely nothing.

Silent, they made their slow way through the heavy vegetation until they came to a break. Here, at Father John's gentle insistence of hand upon his elbow, Tandem turned. He was looking through an avenue in the trees at a full view of the valley.

"You see, Roger Tandem, I had read this article in the *Journal*. It was titled 'Attitudes,' and a good thing for you, for our previous talk about wrong attitudes brought it back to my mind. I decided then and there, to — if you will pardon the seeming egotism of the statement — to go the second mile. Or a third, if need be.

"You see, Roger, when you saw these people, you interpreted the scene in terms of the signs and symbols you are used to. You saw these natives around a device that seemed clearly to be for gambling. You saw further evidences: people on their knees, feverish betting, intent concentration upon the device, and you heard chanting, supplication to Lady Luck, grunts, exclamations, screams of triumph, moans of defeat. You saw a master in charge of ceremonies, the head gambler, the house master.

"What you did not perceive were certain similarities between the postures and sounds adopted during a gambling contest and those that mark the gatherings of certain types of frenetic religious sects in whatever area of the

universe you happen to be. They are much the same. Watch the players in a hot crap game and then observe the antics of the less inhibited devout at certain primitive revival meetings. Is there so much difference?"

"What do you mean?"

Father John pointed through the break.

"You almost became a convert."

The winner was standing proudly by the great pile of statuettes at his feet. He seemed to be exulting inwardly in his victory, for he stood straight and silent, his hands by his sides. But not for long. A number of the burly players seized him from behind. His arms were straightened out and tied to a beam of wood. Another beam, at right angles to the first, was applied to his back. His legs, waist, and head were strapped to it. Crucifix-wise, he was picked up and carried forward.

At the same time, the Whirligig was taken off the post.

Even then, Tandem did not see what his fate might have been until the native was poised face down over the post and its sharp point inserted into the navel. Then a worshiper seized the extended arm and pushed.

If the living Whirligig gave any cry of pain, he could not have been heard above the howl of the assembled faithful. Until the tip of the post thrust into the wood beam on his back, he spun, and the mob chanted.

Father John prayed half-aloud.

"If I have interfered, I have done so through love for this man and because I must choose according to the dictates of my heart. I knew that one of them must die, Father, and I did not think that the man was ready. Perhaps the man of this world was not ready, either, but I had no way of knowing that. He was playing with full knowledge of what he must do if he won, and this man Tandem was not. And Tandem is a man like unto myself, Father, and I must presume that, unless I have knowledge or signs to the contrary, I must do my best to save him so that, some day, he may do his best to save himself.

"But if I have erred, I have done so through ignorance and through love."

When Father John was finished, he led Tandem, who was pale and trembling, up the hill.

"The house always wins," said Father John, who was himself a little pale. "That man that you thought was the Croupier was the head priest. The tears you first saw in his eyes were those of joy at making a convert and those you saw later were those of disappointment at losing one. He wanted you to win in this millennia-old ritual-game. If you had, you could have been the first Earthman to be the living representative of their deity, who was sacrificed in that peculiarly painful fashion. And your winnings would have been buried with you, an offering to the god whose living image you became.

"But, as I said, the house never loses. Later, the head priest would have dug them up and added them to his church's treasury."

"Do you mean that all those signals you were making at the Crou — the priest — were to convince him that I . . . ?"

"Belonged to the God of the Upright Cross, yes. Not the God of the Horizontal Cross. And I almost had him convinced until he must have thought of free will, too, and gave you the chance of joining his sect. I, as you have commented, am not so backward about interfering."

Tandem stopped to light a cigarette. His hand shook, but after a few puffs, with the smoke drifting by in blue veils, he felt better.

Squaring his shoulders and lifting his chin, he said, "Look, Father John, if you think that this is going to scare me so I'll jump in under the shadow of Mother Church's wings, you're wrong. So I made a mistake? It was only a half-error, you'll have to admit, for they *were* gambling. And anybody could have been fooled. I didn't need your help, anyway."

"Really?"

"Well, I suppose it was a good thing that you came along. . . . No, it wasn't. I lost; I couldn't have won with those four ganging up on me. So what did I have to lose? I had a good time, and I'm out nothing."

"You lost your watch."

Father John did not seem to have recovered yet from the shadow that had fallen over him since he had led Tandem away from the valley. The tuning fork inside him hummed deep and black.

"Look, Father," said Tandem, "let's drop all these morals and symbols, huh? No comparisons between my watch and my conscience, huh? You can stretch these things all out of proportion, you know."

He walked fast around the great curve of the ship so he could leave the priest behind. But as he did so, he stopped. A thought that had been roosting in the shadows suddenly hopped into light. He turned and walked back.

"Say, Father, what about those four who were left? I'd have sworn they didn't have enough . . ."

He stopped. Father John was about 25 yards away, his back turned to him. His shoulders were thrown back a little more than they had been, and there was something in the set of his whole body that showed that the humming fork was beginning to vibrate to a lighter note.

Tandem perceived that only half-consciously. It was what Father John was doing that seized him and demanded all of his attention.

The priest was whirling the statuette up into the air and watching it land upon its black legs. Four times, he repeated. Always, the legs dug into the dirt.

Even from that distance, Tandem could feel the power.

Miss Carlson, the rhythm of whose thinking is very off-beat indeed, now gives us a brisk discussion of mother love. But rest assured that Marion Brithtwit's Mama is no Stella Dallas. She wastes no time with futile laments or inept wringing of the hands; her approach to the problem of her daughter's marital happiness is intensely practical. If it takes the good lady a few experiments to find the one correct answer, she is, after all, considerably removed from the scene of action.

Long Distance

by ESTHER CARLSON

MARION BRITHTWIT called her mother long distance.

"Mama," she said, "did I get the right number?"

"Of course you did, dear," her mother's voice came snaking up the telephone wires. "BEelzebub 4-0000. What has that ungrateful wretch of a Philip done now?"

Marion's eyes filled with tears. "You knew, didn't you?" she said. "Oh Mama, I fear he is being unfaithful to me. I have no proof but . . . oh, he is a monster!"

"Now, now, now," her mother's voice was soothing. "I'm so glad you called because I am never without an idea in a case of this kind. Give me a minute. I'll think up a splendid one."

"Don't be too hard on him," Marion said. "I do love him, in spite of everything."

"I don't see why," said her mother. "Ah, I have it!" And she proceeded to outline her plan.

"Wonderful!" Marion said. "How are you, Mama?"

Her mother giggled. "Warmish. But I expected it." And with that she hung up.

Marion emerged from the telephone booth (it never would do to call her mother on their own apartment phone) and took a bus to Macy's where she bought three yards of lovely blue fabric, thimble, buttons and a shirt pattern. She then walked to Ninth Avenue where she soon found the tiny notions shop her mother had specified, and bought thread from the old thrump in charge. All afternoon Marion cut and sewed and stuck her fingers

with the needle but finally the shirt was done, and a beautiful job it was, too.

She met Philip at the door.

"Dearest," she said, "I have a surprise for you. I made you a shirt."

Philip *was* surprised, for his wife was notoriously bumble-fingered and could hardly tie her own shoe laces, but the shirt was clearly a tasty piece of work. It fit exactly and when he had buttoned it, and tucked it in and looped his tie around his neck and stared into the mirror, he whistled.

The Brithtwit in the mirror had bulging muscles gliding sinuously under the folds of his new garment; his chest appeared hard and healthy with the clinging fabric delicately suggesting that hair grew on the vast expanse beneath. Philip peered closer: yes, the color gave those Brithtwit eyes the blue of a melted glacier and returned the receding tide of his hairline.

"Not bad!" said Philip.

"Thank you," Marion murmured, somewhat taken aback by her husband's changed appearance. The poor man looked racked by a dread disease. Those drooping shoulders! That untidy waistline bulge — and had she really made the collar quite that large, so that his naked neck swooped like a scrawny swan's? She had thought the color attractive but now it had taken on a purple tinge that accented his large pink ears. . . .

Philip slapped his chest vigorously and flexed his right biceps.

"Baby," he said, "the boss wants me back tonight. Inventory. Got to go."

Marion turned away hiding a triumphant smile.

"Perfectly all right, dear. I won't expect you till late."

So, after a bite of supper, Philip in his new shirt bade farewell to his wife, slipped around the corner, caught a cab and was presently in the arms of his mistress, Trudy Wabbit, girl wrestler.

Trudy looked like something done by Michelangelo with a blunt axe. Her hair resembled the uncut Samson's and wound thrice about her noble head in braids. She was fifteen inches taller than Philip.

"Phil," she boomed. "You've changed."

Philip expanded his chest and flexed his right arm. "Like it?" he said. "Just for you, you luscious wench."

Trudy's massive mother's heart opened and she realized for the first time how much she loved this puny male. Before she had more or less put up with him; they were always after Trudy, these fellows with their ringside seats and raucous voices, but now . . . ah, she had not fully noticed how frail he was, how mouselike, how adorable. He needed her.

She stroked his forehead. "Little darling," she said tenderly. "Let's run up to the gym."

They ran up to the gym which was the whole third floor of Trudy's house and she put him through knee bends, push-ups, chin-ups; she loaded him with barbells and bounced a medicine ball off his stomach. And when the poor fellow collapsed on the floor, she laid him on the exercise table, massaged him with her fine strong hands, slapped him, cracked his spine, tied him in a knot, straightened him, and sent him to the showers.

"You'll be back tomorrow night, won't you Philsie?" the yearning female begged. "I'm mad for you."

"You bet," Philip said listlessly, and limped home.

Marion opened one sleepless eye.

"How was inventory?"

"Rough," said Phil. "More tomorrow," and he began to snore while Marion wept bitterly into her pillow.

Marion called her mother long distance.

"What!" her mother cried. "I've never known that particular stunt to fail. Well, if it isn't his looks, it must be his brains, wherever they are."

"Mama," wept Marion, "you know he's the best shoe clerk Bothel's ever had!"

"Never mind, honey," her mother said. "I have a perfectly splendid idea. Now listen . . ."

Marion listened, presently began to look more cheerful and finally completed her call. She hurried to the grocer's where she bought beef, garlic, tomato puree, onions and spaghetti; then sought out the murky spice parlor just off Bleecker where an evil old goat sold her a certain red pepper.

All afternoon she boiled and brewed and spattered spaghetti sauce on the kitchen ceiling. She met Philip at the door.

"Darling," she said, "I have a surprise for you. I made your very favorite thing for supper."

Philip *was* surprised. His wife was notorious for her defamation of the culinary art and Philip seldom ate a meal of hers unless he checked the can it came from. But the spaghetti was delicious, though perhaps a trifle long on cayenne. It burned his tongue.

Nevertheless, he felt wonderful. His brain seemed alive, crackling, full of delectable remarks and quotable quotes. I believe, he thought, age is improving me and the cream of wisdom has finally risen to the top; all my experience has become distilled into epigrams and I could write a witty book, had I the inclination.

"It's not the heat, it's the humidity," he said to Marion, watching closely for her reaction.

"What?" she asked vaguely.

Just as he thought! His wife was too dull, too lumpish to appreciate his wise observation upon a matter common to all humanity. He tried again:

"But they do say a rolling stone gathers little moss."

"Oh?" said Marion.

Philip gave up. "Time flies," he said hurriedly, downing the last of the fiery sauce, and left Marion with a perplexed expression on her face which changed later into a knowing smirk.

Philip walked around the corner, caught a cab, gave the address of a well-known Park Avenue apartment house, and before long was in the arms of his mistress, Agatha Turkle, girl Congresswoman.

"Well, look who's here!" she said sarcastically. (Agatha was naturally sarcastic to men. She had degrees from nine universities, was feared as an air-conditioner in smoke-filled rooms, and always wore a tuxedo in the evenings.)

Philip cast himself upon one of the low couches in the living room; immediately thought better of it, rose, and placed his elbow on the mantelpiece. From this position he began to utter all those brilliant *mots* that crowded his mind. In the middle of his statement that, in his opinion, some men are born great, others achieve greatness, while still others have greatness thrust upon them, it suddenly occurred to Agatha that here was the man she had been looking for all her life. Up to this time she had merely tolerated Philip — he mixed a fair martini — but now she realized that before her stood the animated proof that women were more equal than men and should have more equal rights, and she loved him for it.

"Philip," she said, "you may come here. You may remove my shirt studs. I have a plan for you."

During the next few hours the Congresswoman gave the young man an enlightening course in world history, a résumé of economics from Adam Smith to M. D. LaSalle, an outline of biology and, of course, a taste of the fine arts.

"And I want you to come back, Philip," she said, detaining him at the door. "I shall wait for you. Though they shall miss me on the floor of the House, you have given me more. You have given me a sense of the fitness of things." And with that she piled several heavy volumes into his arms for homework and he made his way back to his apartment.

"Is that you?" Marion asked, turning on the bedlamp. "How was inventory?"

"Not over yet," Philip answered shortly, and began to snore, and Marion wept bitterly throughout the night onto the sleeve of her nightgown.

In the morning she called her mother long distance. All she could do was sob into the mouthpiece.

"So that's it," said her mother. "Well, if it isn't his looks, if it isn't his brains, what on *earth* makes Philip irresistible? Are you sure it *isn't* inventory, my dear?"

"Quite sure," sobbed Marion. "A woman has ways. . . ."

"All right," her mother said hastily. "Now tell me, what is it *you* see in him, Marion. That's our answer."

Marion thought a moment. "Oh Mama," she said, "I love him because, well, he's so ordinary. Just sort of average, you know."

"There we have it!" her mother shouted in glee, and she made Marion listen to her instructions carefully and repeat them after her. Marion hung up, entered the adjacent drug store and ordered attar of roses, bay rum, rubbing alcohol, cod liver oil and a limeade. She then rummaged around the Battery until she located the cellar barber shop where a cross-eyed dwarf sold her a packet of white powder.

All afternoon she remained in the bathroom where, wearing two pair of rubber gloves, she mixed a steaming mess. When it cooled she put it in a bottle, labeled it in Latin and tied it in a package.

She met Philip at the door.

"Dearest Philip," said she. "I have a surprise for you. I bought you a bottle of hair tonic at a great bargain."

And indeed, Philip *was* surprised for his wife was notoriously disinterested in any kind of soap or grooming aid, but he found the hair tonic to be a pearl of no small price. He shook some on his hair and every individual strand just lay right down as though trained to the trick, and, upon examination in the mirror, he noted that his docile hair-do made him look and therefore feel somehow substantial and a pillar in the community.

Marion watched him clamp his hat on his head upside down and run screaming up the street, and shrugged.

Before long Philip was hand-over-handing it up the underside of a fire escape in the West Eighties, had smashed a window on the fourteenth floor and was in the arms of his mistress, Constance K. Crabtree, girl psychoanalyst.

"And to think," Constance mused aloud, when he was hypnotized on the couch, "that I was bored with him and about to give him the gate. He was such a dull and sane young man. Little did I know he would suddenly develop such fascinating symptoms. I must keep him here forever."

At that moment there was a mighty hammering at the door and in strode Trudy Wabbit followed closely by Agatha Turkle in a dinner jacket.

"There he is," the two women screamed. "My man!"

"Quite wrong," Constance said coldly. "My man."

Then followed a merry free-for-all in which Trudy got Constance in a

hammerlock while Constance was hypnotizing Agatha while Agatha was jabbing Trudy with a long hat pin.

When Philip came to, the three of them were in death throes on the rug, a triple homicide and all for love.

"Good heavens," Philip cried. "What am I doing here? I, a pillar in the community!" And he hurried home.

Marion sat up in bed and watched her erring husband tiptoe into the room. "How was inventory?" she asked.

"We finally finished her, thank God," he said.

Marion wept tears of joy on his pajama top throughout the night.

In the morning Marion called her mother long distance.

"Mama," she sang, "guess what happened!"

Her mother giggled. "I know," she said. "Isn't it just too splendid? Trudy and Connie and Aggie just arrived and are telling me all about it."

"You're a dear old fiend, Mama," Marion said affectionately. "Have fun."

Marion and Philip did not, of course, live happily ever after. Philip became such a faithful husband that Marion soon lost interest in him and they were divorced within the year.

Department of Abject Apology

Description of Coggins cover as given on p. 1 of F&SF for August:

(Erecting a communications tower on Triton; Uranus in background.)

Postcard from Willy Ley:

"I must say that Uranus looks awfully big when viewed from Neptune's larger moon."

Promise by the Editors:

Much though the admission may pain us,
We confess our behavior's been heinous.

In the future we swear
To read proofs with due care
And keep Triton remote from Uranus.
[Although all that is classically pure in us
Insists that the word should be Uranus.]

That favored theme of science fiction, the encounter between men and aliens from outer space, is so often told in such large-scale terms that it fails to achieve any sense of personal immediacy. With rare understanding of this problem, Mr. Porges confines his action to the struggle between one man, no greater or lesser than most of us, and a monstrously invincible collector of earth life-forms. As a result, only the most callous reader can fail to share the furious despair Jim Irwin knew in one terror-filled night in the north woods.

The Ruum

by ARTHUR PORGES

THE CRUISER *Ilkor* had just gone into her interstellar overdrive beyond the orbit of Pluto when a worried officer reported to the Commander.

"Excellency," he said uneasily, "I regret to inform you that because of a technician's carelessness, a Type H-9 Ruum has been left behind on the third planet, together with anything it may have collected."

The Commander's triangular eyes hooded momentarily, but when he spoke his voice was level.

"How was the ruum set?"

"For a maximum radius of 30 miles, and 160 pounds plus or minus fifteen."

There was silence for several seconds, then the Commander said: "We cannot reverse course now. In a few weeks we'll be returning, and can pick up the ruum then. I do not care to have one of those costly, self-energizing models charged against my ship. You will see," he ordered coldly, "that the individual responsible is severely punished."

But at the end of its run, in the neighborhood of Rigel, the cruiser met a flat, ring-shaped raider; and when the inevitable fire-fight was over, both ships, semi-molten, radioactive, and laden with dead, were starting a billion year orbit around the star.

And on the earth, it was the age of reptiles.

When the two men had unloaded the last of the supplies, Jim Irwin watched his partner climb into the little seaplane. He waved at Walt.

"Don't forget to mail that letter to my wife," Jim shouted.

"The minute I land," Walt Leonard called back, starting to rev the engine. "And you find us some uranium — a strike is just what Cele needs. A fortune for your son and her, hey?" His white teeth flashed in a grin. "Don't rub noses with any grizzlies — shoot 'em, but don't scare 'em to death!"

Jim thumbed his nose as the seaplane speeded up, leaving a frothy wake. He felt a queer chill as the amphibian took off. For three weeks he would be isolated in this remote valley of the Canadian Rockies. If for any reason the plane failed to return to the icy blue lake, he would surely die. Even with enough food, no man could surmount the frozen peaks and make his way on foot over hundreds of miles of almost virgin wilderness. But of course Walt Leonard would return on schedule, and it was up to Jim whether or not they lost their stake. If there was any uranium in the valley, he had twenty-one days to find it. To work then, and no gloomy forebodings.

Moving with the unhurried precision of an experienced woodsman, he built a lean-to in the shelter of a rocky overhang. For this three weeks of summer, nothing more permanent was needed. Perspiring in the strong morning sun, he piled his supplies back under the ledge, well covered by a waterproof tarpaulin, and protected from the larger animal prowlers. All but the dynamite; that he cached, also carefully wrapped against moisture, 200 yards away. Only a fool shares his quarters with a box of high explosives.

The first two weeks went by all too swiftly, without any encouraging finds. There was only one good possibility left, and just enough time to explore it. So early one morning towards the end of his third week, Jim Irwin prepared for a last-ditch foray into the northeast part of the valley, a region he had not yet visited.

He took the Geiger counter, slipping on the earphones reversed, to keep the normal rattle from dulling his hearing, and reaching for the rifle, set out, telling himself it was now or never so far as this particular expedition was concerned. The bulky .30-06 was a nuisance and he had no enthusiasm for its weight, but the huge grizzlies of Canada are not intruded upon with impunity, and take a lot of killing. He'd already had to dispose of two, a hateful chore, since the big bears were vanishing all too fast. And the rifle had proved a great comfort on several ticklish occasions when actual firing had been avoided. The .22 pistol he left in its sheepskin holster in the lean-to.

He was whistling at the start, for the clear, frosty air, the bright sun on blue-white ice fields, and the heady smell of summer, all delighted his heart despite his bad luck as a prospector. He planned to go one day's journey to the new region, spend about 36 hours exploring it intensively, and be back in time to meet the plane at noon. Except for his emergency packet, he took no food or water. It would be easy enough to knock over a rabbit, and the

streams were alive with firm-fleshed rainbow trout of the kind no longer common in the States.

All morning Jim walked, feeling an occasional surge of hope as the counter chattered. But its clatter always died down. The valley had nothing radioactive of value, only traces. Apparently they'd made a bad choice. His cheerfulness faded. They needed a strike badly, especially Walt. And his own wife, Cele, with a kid on the way. But there was still a chance. These last 36 hours — he'd snoop at night, if necessary — might be the pay-off. He reflected a little bitterly that it would help quite a bit if some of those birds he'd staked would make a strike and return his dough. Right this minute there was close to 8,000 bucks owing to him.

A wry smile touched his lips, and he abandoned unprofitable speculations for plans about lunch. The sun, as well as his stomach, said it was time. He had just decided to take out his line and fish a foaming brook, when he rounded a grassy knoll to come upon a sight that made him stiffen to a halt, his jaw dropping.

It was like some enterprising giant's outdoor butcher shop: a great assortment of animal bodies, neatly lined up in a triple row that extended almost as far as the eye could see. And what animals! To be sure, those nearest him were ordinary deer, bear, cougars, and mountain sheep — one of each, apparently — but down the line were strange, uncouth, half-formed, hairy beasts; and beyond them a nightmare conglomeration of reptiles. One of the latter, at the extreme end of the remarkable display, he recognized at once. There had been a much larger specimen fabricated about an incomplete skeleton, of course, in the museum at home.

No doubt about it — it was a small stegosaur, no bigger than a pony!

Fascinated, Jim walked down the line, glancing back over the immense array. Peering more closely at one scaly, dirty-yellow lizard, he saw an eyelid tremble. Then he realized the truth. The animals were not dead, but paralyzed and miraculously preserved. Perspiration prickled his forehead. How long since stegosaurs had roamed this valley?

All at once he noticed another curious circumstance: the victims were roughly of a size. Nowhere, for example, was there a really large saurian. No tyrannosaurus. For that matter, no mammoth. Each specimen was about the size of a large sheep. He was pondering this odd fact, when the underbrush rustled a warning behind him.

Jim Irwin had once worked with mercury, and for a second it seemed to him that a half-filled leather sack of the liquid metal had rolled into the clearing. For the quasi-spherical object moved with just such a weighty, fluid motion. But it was not leather; and what appeared at first a disgusting wartiness, turned out on closer scrutiny to be more like the functional projections

of some outlandish mechanism. Whatever the thing was, he had little time to study it, for after the spheroid had whipped out and retracted a number of metal rods with bulbous, lens-like structures at their tips, it rolled towards him at a speed of about five miles an hour. And from its purposeful advance, the man had no doubt that it meant to add him to the pathetic heap of living-dead specimens.

Uttering an incoherent exclamation, Jim sprang back a number of paces, unslinging his rifle. The ruum that had been left behind was still some 30 yards off, approaching at that moderate but invariable velocity, an advance more terrifying in its regularity than the headlong charge of a mere brute beast.

Jim's hand flew to the bolt, and with practiced deftness he slammed a cartridge into the chamber. He snuggled the battered stock against his cheek, and using the peep sight, aimed squarely at the leathery bulk — a perfect target in the bright afternoon sun. A grim little smile touched his lips as he squeezed the trigger. He knew what one of those 180-grain, metal-jacketed, boat-tail slugs could do at 2700 feet per second. Probably at this close range it would keyhole and blow the foul thing into a mush, by God!

Wham! The familiar kick against his shoulder. E-e-e-e! The whining screech of a ricochet. He sucked in his breath. There could be no doubt whatever. At a mere twenty yards, a bullet from this hard-hitting rifle had glanced from the ruum's surface.

Frantically Jim worked the bolt. He blasted two more rounds, then realized the utter futility of such tactics. When the ruum was six feet away, he saw gleaming finger-hooks flick from warty knobs, and a hollow, sting-like probe, dripping greenish liquid, poised snakily between them. The man turned and fled.

Jim Irwin weighed exactly 149 pounds.

It was easy enough to pull ahead. The ruum seemed incapable of increasing its speed. But Jim had no illusions on that score. The steady five-mile-an-hour pace was something no organism on earth could maintain for more than a few hours. Before long, Jim guessed, the hunted animal had either turned on its implacable pursuer or, in the case of more timid creatures, ran itself to exhaustion in a circle out of sheer panic. Only the winged were safe. But for anything on the ground the result was inevitable: another specimen for the awesome array. And for whom the whole collection? Why? Why?

Coolly, as he ran, Jim began to shed all surplus weight. He glanced at the reddening sun, wondering about the coming night. He hesitated over the rifle; it had proved useless against the ruum, but his military training impelled him to keep the weapon to the last. Still, every pound raised the odds against him in the gruelling race he foresaw clearly. Logic told him that

military reasoning did not apply to a contest like this; there would be no disgrace in abandoning a worthless rifle. And when weight became really vital, the .30-06 would go. But meanwhile he slung it over one shoulder. The Geiger counter he placed as gently as possible on a flat rock, hardly breaking his stride.

One thing was damned certain. This would be no rabbit run, a blind, panicky flight until exhausted, ending in squealing submission. This would be a fighting retreat, and he'd use every trick of survival he'd learned in his hazard-filled lifetime.

Taking deep, measured breaths, he loped along, watching with shrewd eyes for anything that might be used for his advantage in the weird contest. Luckily the valley was sparsely wooded; in brush or forest his straightaway speed would be almost useless.

Suddenly he came upon a sight that made him pause. It was a point where a huge boulder overhung the trail, and Jim saw possibilities in the situation. He grinned as he remembered a Malay mantrap that had once saved his life. Springing to a hillock, he looked back over the grassy plain. The afternoon sun cast long shadows, but it was easy enough to spot the pursuing ruum, still oozing along on Jim's trail. He watched the thing with painful anxiety. Everything hinged upon this brief survey. He was right! Yes, although at most places the man's trail was neither the only route nor the best one, the ruum dogged the footsteps of his prey. The significance of that fact was immense, but Irwin had no more than twelve minutes to implement the knowledge.

Deliberately dragging his feet, Irwin made a clear trail directly under the boulder. After going past it for about ten yards, he walked backwards in his own prints until just short of the overhang, and then jumped up clear of the track to a point behind the balanced rock.

Whipping out his heavy-duty belt knife, he began to dig, scientifically, but with furious haste, about the base of the boulder. Every few moments, sweating with apprehension and effort, he rammed it with one shoulder. At last, it teetered a little. He had just jammed the knife back into its sheath, and was crouching there, panting, when the ruum rolled into sight over a small ridge on his back trail.

He watched the gray spheroid moving towards him and fought to quiet his sobbing breath. There was no telling what other senses it might bring into play, even though the ruum seemed to prefer just to follow in his prints. But it certainly had a whole battery of instruments at its disposal. He crouched low behind the rock, every nerve a charged wire.

But there was no change of technique by the ruum; seemingly intent on the footprints of its prey, the strange sphere rippled along, passing directly

under the great boulder. As it did so, Irwin gave a savage yell, and thrusting his whole muscular weight against the balanced mass, toppled it squarely on the ruum. Five tons of stone fell from a height of twelve feet.

Jim scrambled down. He stood there, staring at the huge lump and shaking his head dazedly. "Fixed that son of a bitch!" he said in a thick voice. He gave the boulder a kick. "Hah! Walt and I might clear a buck or two yet from your little meat market. Maybe this expedition won't be a total loss. Enjoy yourself in hell where you came from!"

Then he leaped back, his eyes wild. The giant rock was shifting! Slowly its five-ton bulk was sliding off the trail, raising a ridge of soil as it grated along. Even as he stared, the boulder tilted, and a gray protuberance appeared under the nearest edge. With a choked cry, Jim Irwin broke into a lurching run.

He ran a full mile down the trail. Then, finally, he stopped and looked back. He could just make out a dark dot moving away from the fallen rock. It progressed as slowly and as regularly and as inexorably as before, and in his direction. Jim sat down heavily, putting his head in his scratched, grimy hands.

But that despairing mood did not last. After all, he had gained a twenty minute respite. Lying down, trying to relax as much as possible, he took the flat packet of emergency rations from his jacket, and eating quickly but without bolting, disposed of some pemmican, biscuit, and chocolate. A few sips of icy water from a streamlet, and he was almost ready to continue his fantastic struggle. But first he swallowed one of the three benzedrine pills he carried for physical crises. When the ruum was still an estimated ten minutes away, Jim Irwin trotted off, much of his wiry strength back, and fresh courage to counter bone-deep weariness.

After running for fifteen minutes, he came to a sheer face of rock about 30 feet high. The terrain on either side was barely passable, consisting of choked gullies, spiky brush, and knife-edged rocks. If Jim could make the top of this little cliff, the ruum surely would have to detour, a circumstance that might put it many minutes behind him.

He looked up at the sun. Huge and crimson, it was almost touching the horizon. He would have to move fast. Irwin was no rock climber but he did know the fundamentals. Using every crevice, roughness, and minute ledge, he fought his way up the cliff. Somehow — unconsciously — he used that flowing climb of a natural mountaineer, which takes each foothold very briefly as an unstressed pivot point in a series of rhythmic advances.

He had just reached the top when the ruum rolled up to the base of the cliff.

Jim knew very well that he ought to leave at once, taking advantage of

the few precious remaining moments of daylight. Every second gained was of tremendous value; but curiosity and hope made him wait. He told himself that the instant his pursuer detoured he would get out of there all the faster. Besides, the thing might even give up and he could sleep right here.

Sleep! His body lusted for it.

But the ruum would not detour. It hesitated only a few seconds at the foot of the barrier. Then a number of knobs opened to extrude metallic wands. One of these, topped with lenses, waved in the air. Jim drew back too late — their uncanny gaze had found him as he lay atop the cliff, peering down. He cursed his idiocy.

Immediately all the wands retracted, and from a different knob a slender rod, blood-red in the setting sun, began to shoot straight up to the man. As he watched, frozen in place, its barbed tip gripped the cliff's edge almost under his nose.

Jim leaped to his feet. Already the rod was shortening as the ruum reabsorbed its shining length. And the leathery sphere was rising off the ground. Swearing loudly, Jim fixed his eyes on the tenacious hook, drawing back one heavy boot.

But experience restrained him. The mighty kick was never launched. He had seen too many rough-and-tumbles lost by an injudicious attempt at the boot. It wouldn't do at all to let any part of his body get within reach of the ruum's superb tools. Instead he seized a length of dry branch, and inserting one end under the metal hook, began to pry.

There was a sputtering flash, white and lacy, and even through the dry wood, he felt the potent surge of power that splintered the end. He dropped the smoldering stick with a gasp of pain, and wringing his numb fingers, backed off several steps, full of impotent rage. For a moment he paused, half inclined to run again, but then his upper lip drew back and snarling, he unslung his rifle. By God! he knew he had been right to lug the damned thing all this way — even if it had beat a tattoo on his ribs. Now he had the ruum right where he wanted it!

Kneeling to steady his aim in the failing light, Jim sighted at the hook and fired. There was a soggy thud as the ruum fell. Jim shouted. The heavy slug had done a lot more than he expected. Not only had it blasted the metal claw loose, but it had smashed a big gap in the cliff's edge. It would be pretty damned hard for the ruum to use that part of the rock again!

He looked down. Sure enough, the ruum was back at the bottom. Jim Irwin grinned. Every time the thing clamped a hook over the bluff, he'd blow that hook loose. There was plenty of ammunition in his pocket and, until the moon rose, bringing a good light for shooting with it, he'd stick the gun's muzzle inches away if necessary. Besides, the thing — whatever it

might be — was obviously too intelligent to keep up a hopeless struggle. Sooner or later it would accept the detour. And then, maybe the night would help to hide his trail.

Then — he choked and, for a brief moment, tears came to his eyes. Down below, in the dimness, the squat, phlegmatic spheroid was extruding three hooked rods simultaneously in a fanlike spread. In a perfectly coordinated movement, the rods snagged the cliff's edge at intervals of about four feet.

Jim Irwin whipped the rifle to his shoulder. All right — this was going to be just like rapid-fire for record back at Benning. Only, at Benning, they didn't expect good shooting in the dark!

But the first shot was a bull's-eye, smacking the left-hand hook loose in a puff of rock dust. His second shot did almost as well, knocking the gritty stuff loose so the center barb slipped off. But even as he whirled to level at number three, Jim saw it was hopeless.

The first hook was back in place. No matter how well he shot, at least one rod would always be in position, pulling the ruum to the top.

Jim hung the useless rifle muzzle down from a stunted tree and ran into the deepening dark. The toughening of his body, a process of years, was paying off now. So what? Where was he going? What could he do now? Was there anything that could stop the damned thing behind him?

Then he remembered the dynamite.

Gradually changing his course, the weary man cut back towards his camp by the lake. Overhead the stars brightened, pointing the way. Jim lost all sense of time. He must have eaten as he wobbled along, for he wasn't hungry. Maybe he could eat at the lean-to . . . no, there wouldn't be time . . . take a benzedrine pill. No, the pills were all gone and the moon was up and he could hear the ruum close behind. Close.

Quite often phosphorescent eyes peered at him from the underbrush and once, just at dawn, a grizzly whoofed with displeasure at his passage.

Sometime during the night his wife, Cele, stood before him with outstretched arms. "Go away!" he rasped. "Go away! You can make it! It can't chase both of us!" So she turned and ran lightly alongside of him. But when Irwin panted across a tiny glade, Cele faded away into the moonlight and he realized she hadn't been there at all.

Shortly after sunrise Jim Irwin reached the lake. The ruum was close enough for him to hear the dull sounds of its passage. Jim staggered, his eyes closed. He hit himself feebly on the nose, his eyes jerked open and he saw the explosive. The sight of the greasy sticks of dynamite snapped Irwin wide awake.

He forced himself to calmness and carefully considered what to do. Fuse? No. It would be impossible to leave fused dynamite in the trail and time the

detonation with the absolute precision he needed. Sweat poured down his body, his clothes were sodden with it. It was hard to think. The explosion *must* be set off from a distance and at the exact moment the ruum was passing over it. But Irwin dared not use a long fuse. The rate of burning was not constant enough. Couldn't calibrate it perfectly with the ruum's advance. Jim Irwin's body sagged all over, his chin sank toward his heaving chest. He jerked his head up, stepped back — and saw the .22 pistol where he had left it in the lean-to.

His sunken eyes flashed.

Moving with frenetic haste, he took the half-filled case, piled all the remaining percussion caps among the loose sticks in a devil's mixture. Weaving out to the trail, he carefully placed box and contents directly on his earlier tracks some twenty yards from a rocky ledge. It was a risk — the stuff might go any time — but that didn't matter. He would far rather be blown to rags than end up living but paralyzed in the ruum's outdoor butcher's stall.

The exhausted Irwin had barely hunched down behind the thin ledge of rock before his inexorable pursuer appeared over a slight rise 500 yards away. Jim scrunched deeper into the hollow, then saw a vertical gap, a narrow crack between rocks. That was it, he thought vaguely. He could sight through the gap at the dynamite and still be shielded from the blast. If it was a shield . . . when that half-case blew only twenty yards away . . .

He stretched out on his belly, watching the ruum roll forward. A hammer of exhaustion pounded his ballooning skull. Jesus! When had he slept last? This was the first time he had lain down in hours. Hours? Ha! it was days. His muscles stiffened, locked into throbbing, burning knots. Then he felt the morning sun on his back, soothing, warming, easing . . . No! If he let go, if he slept now, it was the ruum's macabre collection for Jim Irwin! Stiff fingers tightened around the pistol. He'd stay awake! If he lost — if the ruum survived the blast — there'd still be time to put a bullet through his brain.

He looked down at the sleek pistol, then out at the innocent-seeming booby trap. If he timed this right — and he would — the ruum wouldn't survive. No. He relaxed a little, yielding just a bit to the gently insistent sun. A bird whistled softly somewhere above him and a fish splashed in the lake.

Suddenly he was wrenched to full awareness. Damn! Of all times for a grizzly to come snooping about! With the whole of Irwin's camp ready for greedy looting, a fool bear had to come sniffing around the dynamite! The furred monster smelled carefully at the box, nosed around, rumbled deep displeasure at the alien scent of man. Irwin held his breath. Just a touch would blow a cap. A single cap meant . . .

The grizzly lifted his head from the box and growled hoarsely. The box

was ignored, the offensive odor of man was forgotten. Its feral little eyes focussed on a plodding spheroid that was now only forty yards away. Jim Irwin snickered. Until he had met the ruum the grizzly bear of the North American continent was the only thing in the world he had ever feared. And now — why the hell was he so calm about it? — the two terrors of his existence were meeting head on and he was laughing. He shook his head and the great side muscles in his neck hurt abominably. He looked down at his pistol, then out at the dynamite. *These* were the only real things in his world.

About six feet from the bear, the ruum paused. Still in the grip of that almost idiotic detachment, Jim Irwin found himself wondering again what it was, where it had come from. The grizzly arose on its haunches, the embodiment of utter ferocity. Terrible teeth flashed white against red lips. The business-like ruum started to roll past. The bear closed in, roaring. It cuffed at the ruum. A mighty paw, armed with black claws sharper and stronger than scythes, made that cuff. It would have disemboweled a rhinoceros. Irwin cringed as that side-swipe knocked dust from the leathery sphere. The ruum was hurled back several inches. It paused, recovered, and with the same dreadful casualness it rippled on, making a wider circle, ignoring the bear.

But the lord of the woods wasn't settling for any draw. Moving with that incredible agility which has terrified Indians, Spanish, French and Anglo-Americans since the first encounter of any of them with his species, the grizzly whirled, side-stepped beautifully and hugged the ruum. The terrible, shaggy forearms tightened, the slavering jaws champed at the gray surface. Irwin half rose. "Go it!" he croaked. Even as he cheered the clumsy emperor of the wild, Jim thought it was an insane tableau: the village idiot wrestling with a beach ball.

Then silver metal gleamed bright against gray. There was a flash, swift and deadly. The roar of the king abruptly became a whimper, a gurgle and then there was nearly a ton of terror wallowing in death — its throat slashed open. Jim Irwin saw the bloody blade retract into the gray spheroid, leaving a bright red smear on the thing's dusty hide.

And the ruum rolled forward past the giant corpse, implacable, still intent on the man's spoor, his footprints, his pathway. Okay, baby, Jim giggled at the dead grizzly, this is for you, for Cele, for — for lots of poor dumb animals like us — come to, you damned fool, he cursed at himself. And aimed at the dynamite. And very calmly, very carefully, Jim Irwin squeezed the trigger of his pistol.

Briefly, sound first. Then giant hands lifted his body from where he lay, then let go. He came down hard, face in a patch of nettles, but he was sick, he didn't care. He remembered that the birds were quiet. Then there was a

fluid thump as something massive struck the grass a few yards away. Then there was quiet.

Irwin lifted his head . . . all men do in such a case. His body still ached. He lifted sore shoulders and saw . . . an enormous, smoking crater in the earth. He also saw, a dozen paces away, gray-white because it was covered now with powdered rock, the ruum.

It was under a tall, handsome pine tree. Even as Jim watched, wondering if the ringing in his ears would ever stop, the ruum rolled toward him.

Irwin fumbled for his pistol. It was gone. It had dropped somewhere, out of reach. He wanted to pray, then, but couldn't get properly started. Instead, he kept thinking, idiotically, "My sister Ethel can't spell Nebuchadnezzar and never could. My sister Ethel —"

The ruum was a foot away now, and Jim closed his eyes. He felt cool, metallic fingers touch, grip, lift. His unresisting body was raised several inches, and juggled oddly. Shuddering, he waited for the terrible syringe with its green liquid, seeing the yellow, shrunken face of a lizard with one eyelid a-tremble.

Then, dispassionately, without either roughness or solicitude, the ruum put him back on the ground. When he opened his eyes, some seconds later, the sphere was rolling away. Watching it go, he sobbed dryly.

It seemed a matter of moments only, before he heard the seaplane's engine, and opened his eyes to see Walt Leonard bending over him.

Later, in the plane, 5000 feet above the valley, Walt grinned suddenly, slapped him on the back, and cried, "Jim, I can get a whirlybird, a four place job! Why, if we can snatch up just a few of those prehistoric lizards and things while the museum keeper's away, it's like you said — the scientists will pay us plenty."

Jim's hollow eyes lit up. "That's the idea," he agreed. Then, bitterly: "I might just as well have stood in bed. Evidently the damned thing didn't want me at all. Maybe it wanted to know what I paid for these pants! Barely touched me, then let go. And how I ran!"

"Yeah," Walt said. "That was damned queer. And after that marathon. I admire your guts, boy." He glanced sideways at Jim Irwin's haggard face. "That night's run cost you plenty. I figure you lost over ten pounds."



On the face of it, this tale of the encounter between the K Street Chess Club and Zeno, the chessplaying rat, is Mr. Harness in singularly lighthearted mood, portraying pure midsummer madness. Yet, when one finally ceases chortling at the specialized logic with which club members assess Zeno's worth, one begins to wonder. In the days to come, when that first alien-ship-from-outer-space lands on earth, wouldn't it be a good idea to greet it with a delegation of chessplayers?

The Chessplayers

by CHARLES L. HARNESS

NOW PLEASE understand this. I'm not saying that all chessplayers are lunatics. But I do claim that chronic chessplaying affects a man.

Let me tell you about the K Street Chess Club, of which I was once treasurer.

Our membership roll claimed a senator, the leader of a large labor union, the president of the A. & W. Railroad, and a few other big shots. But it seemed the more important they were *outside*, the rottener they were as chessplayers.

The senator and the rail magnate didn't know the Ruy Lopez from the Queen's Gambit, so of course they could only play the other fish, or hang around wistfully watching the games of the Class A players and wishing that they, too, amounted to something.

The club's champion was Bobby Baker, a little boy in the fourth grade at the Pestalozzi-Borstal Boarding School. Several of his end game compositions had been published in *Chess Review* and *Shakhmatny Russkji Zhurnal* before he could talk plainly.

Our second best was Pete Summers, a clerk for the A. & W. Railroad. He was the author of two very famous chess books. One book proved that white can always win, and the other proved that black can always draw. As you might suspect, the gap separating him from the president of his railroad was abysmal indeed.

The show position was held by Jim Bradley, a chronic idler whose dues were paid by his wife. The club's admiration for him was profound.

But experts don't make a club. You have to have some guiding spirit,

a fairly good player, with a knack for organization and a true knowledge of values.

Such a gem we had in our secretary, Nottingham Jones.

It was really my interest in Nottingham that led me to join the K Street Chess Club. I wanted to see if he was an exception, or whether they were all alike.

After I tell you about their encounter with Zeno, you can judge for yourself.

In his unreal life Nottingham Jones was a statistician in a government bureau. He worked at a desk in a big room with many other desks, including mine, and he performed his duties blankly and without conscious effort. Many an afternoon, after the quitting bell had rung and I had strolled over to discuss club finances with him, he would be astonished to discover that he had already come to work and had turned out a creditable stack of forms.

I suppose that it was during these hours of his quasi-existence that the invisible Nottingham conceived those numerous events that had made him famous as a chess club emcee throughout the United States.

For it was Nottingham who organized the famous American-Soviet cable matches (in which the U.S. team had been so soundly trounced), refereed numerous U.S. match championships, and launched a dozen brilliant but impecunious foreign chess masters on exhibition tours in a hundred chess clubs from New York to Los Angeles.

But the achievements of which he was proudest were his bishop-knight tournaments.

Now the bishop is supposed to be slightly stronger than the knight, and this evaluation has become so ingrained in chess thinking today that no player will voluntarily exchange a bishop for an enemy knight. He may squander his life's savings on phony stock, talk back to traffic cops, and forget his wedding anniversary, but never, never, *never* will he exchange a bishop for a knight.

Nottingham suspected this fixation to be ill-founded; he had the idea that the knight was just as strong as the bishop, and to prove his point he held numerous intramural tournaments in the K Street Club, in which one player used six pawns and a bishop against the six pawns and a knight of his opponent.

Jones never did make up his mind as to whether the bishop was stronger than the knight, but at the end of a couple of years he did know that the K Street Club had more bishop-knight experts than any other club in the United States.

And it then occurred to him that American chess had a beautiful means

of redeeming itself from its resounding defeat at the hands of the Russian cable team.

He sent his challenge to Stalin himself — the K Street Chess Club versus All the Russians — a dozen boards of bishop-knight games, to be played by cable.

The Soviet Recreation Bureau sent the customary six curt rejections and then promptly accepted.

And this leads us back to one afternoon at 5 o'clock when Nottingham Jones looked up from his desk and seemed startled to find me standing there.

"Don't get up yet," I said. "This is something you ought to take sitting down."

He stared at me owlishly. "Is the year's rent due again so soon?"

"Next week. This is something else."

"Oh?"

"A professor friend of mine," I said, "who lives in the garret over my apartment, wants to play the whole club at one sitting — a simultaneous exhibition."

"A simul, eh? Pretty good, is he?"

"It isn't exactly the professor who wants to play. It's really a friend of his."

"Is *he* good?"

"The professor says so. But that isn't exactly the point. To make it short, this professor, Dr. Schmidt, owns a pet rat. He wants the rat to play." I added: "And for the usual simul fee. The professor needs money. In fact, if he doesn't get a steady job pretty soon he may be deported."

Nottingham looked dubious. "I don't see how we can help him. Did you say *rat*?"

"I did."

"A chessplaying rat? A four-legged one?"

"Right. Quite a drawing card for the club, eh?"

Nottingham shrugged his shoulders. "We learn something every day. Will you believe it, I never heard they cared for the game. Women don't. However, I once read about an educated horse . . . I suppose he's well known in Europe?"

"Very likely," I said. "The professor specializes in comparative psychology."

Nottingham shook his head impatiently. "I don't mean the professor. I'm talking about the rat. What's his name, anyway?"

"Zeno."

"Never heard of him. What's his tournament score?"

"I don't think he ever played in any tournaments. The professor taught

him the game in a concentration camp. How good he is I don't know, except that he can give the professor rook odds."

Nottingham smiled pityingly. "I can give you rook odds, but I'm not good enough to throw a simul."

A great light burst over me. "Hey, wait a minute. You're completely overlooking the fantastic fact that Zeno is a —"

"The only pertinent question," interrupted Nottingham, "is whether he's really in the *master* class. We've got half a dozen players in the club who can throw an 'inside' simul for free, but when we hire an outsider and charge the members a dollar each to play him, he's got to be good enough to tackle *our* best. And when the whole club's in training for the bishop-knight cable match with the Russians next month, I can't have them relaxing over a mediocre simul."

"But you're missing the whole point —"

"— which is, this Zeno needs money and you want me to throw a simul to help him. But I just can't do it. I have a duty to the members to maintain a high standard."

"But Zeno is a rat. He learned to play chess in a concentration camp. He —"

"That doesn't necessarily make him a good player."

It was all cockeyed. My voice trailed off. "Well, somehow it seemed like a good idea."

Nottingham saw that he had let me down too hard. "If you want to, you might arrange a game between Zeno and one of our top players — say Jim Bradley. He has lots of time. If Jim says Zeno is good enough for a simul, we'll give him a simul."

So I invited Jim Bradley and the professor, including Zeno, to my apartment the next evening.

I had seen Zeno before, but that was when I thought he was just an ordinary pet rat. Viewed as a chessmaster he seemed to be a completely different creature. Both Jim and I studied him closely when the professor pulled him out of his coat pocket and placed him on the chess table.

You could tell, just by looking at the little animal, from the way his beady black eyes shone and the alert way he carried his head, that here was a super-rat, an Einstein among rodents.

"Chust let him get his bearings," said the professor, as he fixed a little piece of cheese to Bradley's king with a thumb tack. "And don't worry, he will make a good showing."

Zeno pitter-pattered around the board, sniffed with a bored delicacy at both his and Bradley's chess pieces, twitched his nose at Bradley's cheese-

crowned king, and gave the impression that the only reason he didn't yawn was that he was too well bred. He returned to his side of the board and waited for Bradley to move.

Jim blinked, shook himself, and finally pushed his queen pawn two squares.

Zeno minced out, picked up his own queen pawn between his teeth, and moved it forward two squares. Then Jim moved out his queen bishop pawn, and the game was under way, a conventional Queen's Gambit Declined.

I got the professor off in a corner. "How did you teach him to play? You never did tell me."

"Was easy. Tied each chessman in succession to body and let Zeno run simple maze on the chessboard composed of moves of chess man, until reached king and got piece of bread stuck on crown. Next, ve — one moment, please."

We both looked at the board. Zeno had knocked over Jim's king and was tapping with his dainty forefoot in front of the fallen monarch.

Jim was counting the taps with silent lips. "He's announcing a mate in thirteen. And he's right."

Zeno was already nibbling at the little piece of cheese fixed to Jim's king.

When I reported the result to Nottingham the next day, he agreed to hold a simultaneous exhibition for Zeno. Since Zeno was an unknown, with no reputation and no drawing power, Jones naturally didn't notify the local papers, but merely sent post cards to the club members.

On the night of the simul Nottingham set up 25 chess tables in an approximate circle around the club room. Here and there the professor pushed the tables a little closer together so that Zeno could jump easily from one to the other as he made his rounds. Then the professor made a circuit of all the tables and tacked a little piece of cheese to each king.

After that he mopped at his face, stepped outside the circle, and Zeno started his rounds.

And then we hit a snag.

A slow gray man emerged from a little group of spectators and approached the professor.

"Dr. Hans Schmidt?" he asked.

"Ya," said the professor, a little nervously. "I mean, yes sir."

The gray man pulled out his pocketbook and flashed something at the professor. "Immigration service. Do you have in your possession a renewed immigration visa?"

The professor wet his lips and shook his head wordlessly.

The other continued. "According to our records you don't have a job,

haven't paid your rent for a month, and your credit has run out at the local delicatessen. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to come along with me."

"You mean — *deportation*?"

"How do I know? Maybe, maybe not."

The professor looked as though a steam roller had just passed over him. "So it comes," he whispered. "I knew I should not haf come out from hiding, but one needs money. . . ."

"Too bad," said the immigration man. "Of course, if you could post a \$500 bond as surety for your self-support —"

"Had I \$500, would I be behind at the delicatessen?"

"No, I guess not. That your hat and coat?"

The professor started sadly toward the coat-racks.

I grabbed at his sleeve.

"Now hold on," I said hurriedly. "Look, mister, in two hours Dr. Schmidt will have a contract for a 52-week exhibition tour." I exclaimed to the professor: "Zeno will make you all the money you can spend! When the simul is over tonight, Nottingham Jones will recommend you to every chess club in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Think of it! Zeno! History's only chess-playing rat!"

"Not so fast," said Nottingham, who had just walked up. "I've got to see how good this Zeno is before I back him."

"Don't worry," I said. "Why, the bare fact that he's a rat —"

The gray man interrupted. "You mean you want me to wait a couple of hours until we see whether the professor is going to get some sort of a contract?"

"That's right," I said eagerly. "After Zeno shows what he can do, the professor gets a chess exhibition tour."

The gray man was studying Zeno with distant distaste. "Well, okay. I'll wait."

The professor heaved a gigantic sigh and trotted off to watch his protégé.

"Say," said the gray man to me, "you people ought to keep a cat in this place. I was sure I saw a rat running around over there."

"That's Zeno," I said. "He's playing chess."

"Don't get sarcastic, Jack. I was just offering a suggestion." He wandered off to keep an eye on the professor.

The evening wore on, and the professor used up all his handkerchiefs and borrowed one of mine. But I couldn't see what he was worried about, because it was clear that Zeno was a marvel, right up there in the ranks of Lasker, Alekhine, and Botvinnik.

In every game, he entered into an orgy of complications. One by one

his opponents teetered off the razor's edge, and had to resign. One by one the tables emptied, and the losers gathered around those who were still struggling. The clusters around Bobby Baker, Pete Summers, and Jim Bradley grew minute by minute.

But at the end of the second hour, when only the three club champions were still battling, I noticed that Zeno was slowing down.

"What's wrong, professor?" I whispered anxiously.

He groaned. "For supper he chenerally gets only two little pieces cheese."

And so far tonight Zeno had eaten twenty-three! He was so fat he could hardly waddle.

I groaned too, and thought of tiny stomach pumps.

We watched tensely as Zeno pulled himself slowly from Jim Bradley's board over to Pete Summers'. It seemed to take him an extraordinarily long time to analyze the position on Pete's board. At last he made his move and crawled across to Bobby Baker's table.

And it was there, chin resting on the pedestal of his king rook, that he collapsed into gentle rodent slumber.

The professor let out an almost inaudible but heart-rending moan.

"Don't just stand there!" I cried. "Wake him up!"

The professor prodded the little animal gingerly with his forefinger. "*Liebchen*," he pleaded, "*wach' auf!*"

But Zeno just rolled comfortably over on his back.

A deathly silence had fallen over the room, and it was on account of this that we heard what we heard.

Zeno began to snore.

Everybody seemed to be looking in other directions when the professor lifted the little animal up and dropped him tenderly into his wrinkled coat pocket.

The gray man was the first to speak. "Well, Dr. Schmidt? No contract?"

"Don't be silly," I declared. "Of course he gets a tour. Nottingham, how soon can you get letters off to the other clubs?"

"But I really can't recommend him," demurred Nottingham. "After all, he defaulted three out of 25 games. He's only a *Kleinmeister* — not the kind of material to make a simul circuit."

"What if he *didn't* finish three measly games? He's a good player, all the same. All you have to do is say the word and every club secretary in North America will make a date with him — at an entrance fee of \$5 per player. He'll take the country by storm!"

"I'm sorry," Nottingham said to the professor. "I have a certain standard, and your boy just doesn't make the grade."

The professor sighed. "*Ja, ich versteh'.*"

"But this is crazy!" My voice sounded a little louder than I had intended. "You fellows don't agree with Nottingham, do you? How about you, Jim?"

Jim Bradley shrugged his shoulders. "Hard to say just how good Zeno is. It would take a week of close analysis to say definitely who has the upper hand in *my* game. He's a pawn down, but he has a wonderful position."

"But Jim," I protested. "That isn't the point at all. Can't you see it? Think of the publicity . . . a chess-playing *rat* . . .!"

"I wouldn't know about his personal life," said Jim curtly.

"Fellows!" I said desperately. "Is this the way all of you feel? Can't enough of us stick together to pass a club resolution recommending Zeno for a simul circuit? How about you, Bobby?"

Bobby looked uncomfortable. "I think the school station wagon is waiting for me. I guess I ought to be getting back."

"Coming, doc?" asked the gray man.

"Yes," replied Dr. Schmidt heavily. "Good evening, chentlemen."

I just stood there, stunned.

"Here's Zeno's income for the evening, professor," said Nottingham, pressing an envelope into his hand. "I'm afraid it won't help much, though, especially since I didn't feel justified in charging the customary dollar fee."

The professor nodded, and in numb silence I watched him accompany the immigration officer to the doorway.

The professor and I versus the chessplayers. We had thrown our Sunday punches, but we hadn't even scratched their gambit.

Just then Pete Summers called out. "Hey, Dr. Schmidt!" He held up a sheet of paper covered with chess diagrams. "This fell out of your pocket when you were standing here."

The professor said something apologetic to the gray man and came back. "*Danke*," he said, reaching for the paper. "Is part of a manuscript."

"A chess manuscript, professor?" I was grasping at straws now. "Are you writing a chess book?"

"Ya, I guess."

"Well, well," said Pete Summers, who was studying the sheet carefully. "The bishop against the knight, eh?"

"Ya. Now if you excuse me —"

"The bishop versus the knight?" shrilled Bobby Baker, who had trotted back to the tables.

"The bishop and knight?" muttered Nottingham Jones. He demanded abruptly: "Have you studied the problem long, professor?"

"Many months. In camp . . . in attic. And now manuscript has reached 2,000 pages, and we look for publisher."

"We . . . ?" My voice may have trembled a little, because both Nottingham and the professor turned and looked at me sharply. "Professor" — my words spilled out in a rush — "did Zeno write that book?"

"Who else?" answered the professor in wonder.

"I don't see how he could hold a pen," said Nottingham doubtfully.

"Not necessary," said the professor. "He made moves, and I wrote down." He added with wistful pride: "Zenchen is probably world's greatest living authority on bishop-knight."

The room was suddenly very still again. For an overlong moment the only sound was Zeno's muffled snoring spiraling up from the professor's pocket.

"Has he reached any conclusions?" breathed Nottingham.

The professor turned puzzled eyes to the intent faces about him. "Zeno believes conflict cannot be cheneralized. However, has discovered 78 positions in which bishop superior to knight and 24 positions in which knight is better. Obviously, player mit bishop must try —"

"— for one of the winning bishop positions, of course, and ditto for the knight," finished Nottingham. "That's an extremely valuable manuscript."

All this time I had been getting my first free breath of the evening. It felt good. "It's too bad," I said casually, "that the professor can't stay here long enough for you sharks to study Zeno's book and pick up some pointers for the great bishop-knight cable match next month. It's too bad, too, that Zeno won't be here to take a board against the Russians. He'd give us a sure point on the score."

"Yeah," said Jim Bradley. "He would."

Nottingham shot a question at the professor. "Would Zeno be willing to rent the manuscript to us for a month?"

The professor was about to agree when I interrupted. "That would be rather difficult, Nottingham. Zeno doesn't know where he'll be at the end of the month. Furthermore, as treasurer for the club, let me inform you that after we pay the annual rent next week, the treasury will be as flat as a pancake."

Nottingham's face fell.

"Of course," I continued carefully, "if you were willing to underwrite a tour for Zeno, I imagine he'd be willing to lend it to you for nothing. And then the professor wouldn't have to be deported, and Zeno could stay and coach our team, as well as take a board in the cable match."

Neither the professor or I breathed as we watched Nottingham struggling over that game of solitaire chess with his soul. But finally his owlish face gathered itself into an austere stubbornness. "I still can't recommend Zeno for a tour. I have my standards."

Several of the other players nodded gloomily.

"I'm scheduled to play against Kereslov," said Pete Summers, looking sadly at the sheet of manuscript. "But I agree with you, Nottingham."

I knew about Kereslov. The Moscow Club had been holding intramural bishop-knight tournaments every week for the past six months, and Kereslov had won nearly all of them.

"And I have to play Botvinnik," said Jim Bradley. He added feebly, "But you're right, Nottingham. We can't ethically underwrite a tour for Zeno."

Botvinnik was merely chess champion of the world.

"What a shame," I said. "Professor, I'm afraid we'll have to make a deal with the Soviet Recreation Bureau." It was just a sudden screwy inspiration. I still wonder whether I would have gone through with it if Nottingham hadn't said what he said next.

"Mister," he asked the immigration official, "you want \$500 put up for Dr. Schmidt?"

"That's the customary bond."

Nottingham beamed at me. "We have more than that in the treasury, haven't we?"

"Sure. We have exactly \$500.14, of which \$500 is for rent. Don't look at me like that."

"The directors of this club," declared Nottingham sonorously, "hereby authorize you to draw a check for \$500 payable to Dr. Schmidt."

"Are you cuckoo?" I yelped. "Where do you think I'm going to get another \$500 for the rent? You lunatics will wind up playing your cable match in the middle of K Street!"

"This," said Nottingham coldly, "is the greatest work on chess since Murray's *History*. After we're through with it, I'm sure we can find a publisher for Zeno. Would you stand in the way of such a magnificent contribution to chess literature?"

Pete Summers chimed in accusingly. "Even if you can't be a friend to Zeno, you could at least think about the good of the club and of American chess. You're taking a very funny attitude about this."

"But of course you aren't a real chessplayer," said Bobby Baker sympathetically. "We never had a treasurer who was."

Nottingham sighed. "I guess it's about time to elect another treasurer."

"All right," I said bleakly. "I'm just wondering what I'm going to tell the landlord next week. He isn't a chessplayer either." I told the gray man, "Come over here to the desk, and I'll make out a check."

He frowned. "A check? From a bunch of chessplayers? Not on your life! Let's go, professor."

Just then a remarkable thing happened. One of our most minor members spoke up.

"I'm Senator Brown, one of Mr. Jones's *fellow chessplayers*. I'll endorse that check, if you like."

And then there was a popping noise and a button flew by my ear. I turned quickly to see a vast blast of smoke terminated by three perfect smoke rings. Our rail magnate tapped at his cigar. "I'm Johnson, of the A. & W. *We chessplayers* stick together on these matters. I'll endorse that check, too. And Nottingham, don't worry about the rent. The senator and I will take care of that."

I stifled an indignant gasp. *I* was the one worrying about the rent, not Nottingham. But of course I was beneath their notice. I wasn't a *chessplayer*.

The gray man shrugged his shoulders. "Okay, I'll take the bond and recommend an indefinite renewal."

Five minutes later I was standing outside the building gulping in the fresh cold air when the immigration officer walked past me toward his car.

"Goodnight," I said.

He ducked a little, then looked up. When he answered, he seemed to be talking more to himself than to me. "It was the funniest thing. You got the impression there was a little rat running around on those boards and moving the pieces with his teeth. But of course rats don't play chess. Just human beings." He peered at me through the dusk, as though trying to get things in focus. "There wasn't really a rat playing chess in there, was there?"

"No," I said. "There wasn't any rat in there. And no human beings, either. Just chessplayers."

Note:

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It's possible, if highly improbable, that some science-fantasy readers are so absorbed in this special field that they do not know the name of Raymond Chandler, universally acclaimed as the King or at least (we're old Hammett men ourselves) the Crown Prince of the few writers who have raised the hard-boiled detective story to the level of literature. But this most realistic exponent of the simple art of murder could, if he but wished, have as high a reputation among fantasy-readers as among crime-enthusiasts. It is rumored that Mr. Chandler has, purely for his own pleasure, written innumerable fantasies that have never been published or even submitted for publication; certainly the two that he has allowed to appear indicate that he can make the impossible as convincing as any of the all-too-possible criminal cases of private detective Philip Marlowe. We're happy to revive for you the first of the published Chandler fantasies: a story, as is not surprising, of murder and even of detection, but also a most persuasive presentation of the disturbing thesis that "things might happen to a man, if a man would just let them happen."

The Bronze Door

by RAYMOND CHANDLER

THE LITTLE MAN was from the Calabar coast or from Papua or Tongatabu, some such remote place like that. An empire-builder frayed at the temples, thin and yellow, and slightly drunk at the club bar. And he was wearing a faded school tie he had probably kept year after year in a tin box so the centipedes wouldn't eat it.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish didn't know him, at least not then, but he knew the tie because it was his own school tie. So he spoke to the man timidly, and the man talked to him, being a little drunk and not knowing anybody. They had drinks and talked of the old school, in that peculiar, remote way the English have, without exchanging names, but friendly underneath.

It was a big thrill for Mr. Sutton-Cornish, because nobody ever talked to him at the club except the servants. He was too ingrowing, and you don't have to talk to people in London clubs. That's what they're for.

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Mr. Sutton-Cornish got home to tea a little thick-tongued, for the first time in fifteen years. He sat there blankly in the upstairs drawing room, holding his cup of tepid tea and going over the man's face in his mind, making it younger and chubbier, a face that would go over an Eton collar or under a school cricket cap.

Suddenly he got it, and chuckled. That was something he hadn't done in a good few years either.

"Llewellyn, m'dear," he said. "Llewellyn Minor. Had an elder brother. Killed in the War, in the horse artillery."

Mrs. Sutton-Cornish stared at him bleakly across the heavily embroidered tea cozy. Her chestnut-colored eyes were dull with disdain — dried-out chestnuts, not fresh ones. The rest of her large face looked gray. The late October afternoon was gray, and the heavy, full-bottomed, monogrammed curtains across the windows. Even the ancestors on the walls were gray — all except the bad one, the general.

The chuckle died in Mr. Sutton-Cornish's throat. The long gray stare took care of that. Then he shivered a little, and as he wasn't very steady, his hand jerked. He emptied his tea on the rug, almost delicately, cup and all.

"Oh, rot," he said thickly. "Sorry, m'dear. Missed me trousers, though. Awfully sorry, m'dear."

For a full minute Mrs. Sutton-Cornish made only the sound of a large woman breathing. Then suddenly things began to tinkle on her — to tinkle and rustle and squeak. She was full of quaint noises, like a haunted house, but Mr. Sutton-Cornish shuddered, because he knew she was trembling with rage.

"Ah-h-h," she breathed out very, very slowly, after a long time, in her firing-squad manner. "Ah-h-h. Intoxicated, James?"

Something stirred suddenly at her feet. Teddy, the Pomeranian, stopped snoring and lifted his head and smelled blood. He let out a short snapping bark, merely a ranging shot, and waddled to his feet. His protuberant brown eyes stared malignantly at Mr. Sutton-Cornish.

"I'd better ring the bell, m'dear," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said humbly, and stood up. "Hadn't I?"

She didn't answer him. She spoke to Teddy instead, softly. A sort of doughy softness, with something sadistic in it.

"Teddy," she said softly, "look at that man. Look at that man, Teddy."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish said thickly: "Now don't let him snap at me, m'dear. D-don't let him snap at me, please, m'dear."

No answer. Teddy braced himself and leered. Mr. Sutton-Cornish tore his eyes away and looked up at the bad ancestor, the general. The general

wore a scarlet coat with a diagonal blue sash across it, rather like a bar sinister. He had the winy complexion generals used to have in his day. He had a lot of very fruity-looking decorations and a bold stare, the stare of an unrepentant sinner. The general was no violet. He had broken up more homes than he had fought duels, and he had fought more duels than he had won battles, and he had won plenty of battles.

Looking up at the bold-veined face Mr. Sutton-Cornish braced himself, leaned down and took a small triangular sandwich from the tea table.

"Here, Teddy," he gulped. "Catch, boy, catch!"

He threw the sandwich. It fell in front of Teddy's little, brown paws. Teddy snuffled it languidly and yawned. He had his meals served to him on china, not thrown at him. He sidled innocently over to the edge of the rug and suddenly pounced on it, snarling.

"At table, James?" Mrs. Sutton-Cornish said slowly and dreadfully.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish stood on his teacup. It broke into thin light slivers of fine china. He shuddered again.

But now was the time. He started quickly toward the bell. Teddy let him get almost there, still pretending to worry the fringe of the rug. Then he spit out a piece of fringe, and charged low and soundlessly, his small feet like feathers in the nap of the rug. Mr. Sutton-Cornish was just reaching for the bell.

Small bright teeth tore rapidly and expertedly at a pearl-gray spat.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish yelped, pivoted swiftly — and kicked. His neat shoe flashed in the gray light. A silky brown object sailed through the air and landed gobbling.

Then there was a quite indescribable stillness in the room, like the silence in the innermost room of a cold-storage warehouse, at midnight.

Teddy whimpered once, artfully, crept along the floor with his body close to it, crept under Mrs. Sutton-Cornish's chair. Her purplish-brown skirts moved and Teddy's face emerged slowly, framed in silk, the face of a nasty old woman with a shawl over her head.

"Caught me off balance," Mr. Sutton-Cornish mumbled, leaning against the mantelpiece. "Didn't mean . . . never intended —"

Mrs. Sutton-Cornish rose. She rose with the air of gathering a retinue about her. Her voice was the cold bleat of a foghorn on an icy river.

"Chinverly," she said. "I shall leave at once for Chinverly. At once. This hour . . . Drunk! Filthily drunk in the middle of the afternoon. Kicking little inoffensive animals. Vile! Utterly vile! *Open the door!*"

Mr. Sutton-Cornish staggered across the room and opened the door. She went out. Teddy trotted beside her, on the side away from Mr. Sutton-Cornish, and for once he didn't try to trip her in the doorway.

Outside she turned, slowly, as a liner turns.

"James," she said, "have you anything to say to me?"

He giggled — from pure nervous strain.

She looked at him horribly, turned again, said over her shoulder: "This is the end, James. The end of our marriage."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish said appallingly: "Goodness, m'dear — are we married?"

She started to turn again, but didn't. A sound like somebody being strangled in a dungeon came from her. Then she went on.

The door of the room hung open like a paralyzed mouth. Mr. Sutton-Cornish stood just inside it, listening. He didn't move until he heard steps on the floor above — heavy steps — hers. He sighed and looked down at his torn spat. Then he crept downstairs, into his long, narrow study beside the entrance hall, and got at the whisky.

He hardly noticed the sounds of departure, luggage being descended, voices, the throbbing of the big car out in front, voices, the last bark from Teddy's iron-old throat. The house grew utterly silent. The furniture waited with its tongue in its cheek. Outside the lamps were lit in a light fog. Taxis hooted along the wet street. The fire died low in the grate.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish stood in front of it, swaying a little, looking at his long gray face in the wall mirror.

"Take a little stroll," he whispered wryly. "You and me. Never was anyone else, was there?"

He sneaked out into the hall without Collins, the butler, hearing him. He got his scarf and overcoat and hat on, grasped his stick and gloves, let himself out silently into the dusk.

He stood a little while at the bottom of the steps and looked up at the house. No. 14 Grinling Crescent. His father's house, his grandfather's house, his great-grandfather's house. All he had left. The rest was hers. Even the clothes he wore, the money in his bank account. But the house was still his — at least in name.

Four white steps, as spotless as the souls of virgins, leading up to an apple-green, deep-paneled door, painted as things used to be painted long ago, in the age of leisure. It had a brass knocker and a thumb latch above the handle and one of those bells you twisted, instead of pushing or pulling them, and it rang just on the other side of the door, rather ridiculously, if you were not used to it.

He turned and looked across the street at the little railed-in park always kept locked, where on sunny days the small, prim children of Grinling Crescent walked along the smooth paths, around the little ornamental lake, beside the rhododendron bushes, holding the hands of their nursemaids.

He looked at all this a little wanly, then he squared his thin shoulders and marched off into the dusk, thinking of Nairobi and Papua and Tongatabu, thinking of the man in the faded school tie who would go back there presently, wherever it was he came from, and lie awake in the jungle, thinking of London.

"Keb, sir?"

Mr. Sutton-Cornish halted, stood on the edge of the curb and stared. The voice came from above, one of those wind-husked, beery voices you don't hear very often any more. It came from the driver's seat of a hansom cab.

The hansom cab had come out of the darkness, sliding oilily along the street on high rubber-tired wheels, the horse's hoofs making a slow, even *clap-clap* that Mr. Sutton-Cornish hadn't noticed until the driver called down to him.

It looked real enough. The horse had time-worn black blinkers and the characteristic well-fed and yet somehow dilapidated look that cab horses used to have. The half doors of the hansom were folded back and Mr. Sutton-Cornish could see the quilted gray upholstery inside. The long reins were riddled with cracks and following them upward he saw the beefy driver, the wide-brimmed coachman's "topper" he wore, the huge buttons on the upper part of his greatcoat, and the well-worn blanket that swathed the lower part of him round and round. He held his long whip lightly and delicately, as a hansom driver should hold his whip.

The trouble was that there weren't any more hansom cabs.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish gulped, slipped a glove off and reached out to touch the wheel. It was cold, very solid, wet with the muddy slime of the city streets.

"Doubt if I've ever seen one of these since the War," he said out loud, very steadily.

"Wot war, guv'nor?"

Mr. Sutton-Cornish started. He touched the wheel again. Then he smiled, slowly and carefully drew his glove on again.

"I'm getting in," he said.

"Steady there, Prince," the driver wheezed.

The horse switched his long tail contemptuously. Telling *him* to be steady. Mr. Sutton-Cornish climbed in over the wheel, rather clumsily, because one had lost the knack of that art these many years. He closed the half doors around in front of him, leaned back against the seat in the pleasant harness-room smell.

The trap opened over his head and the driver's large nose and alcoholic

eyes made an improbable picture in the opening, like a deep-sea fish staring you down through the glass wall of an aquarium.

"Where to, guv'nor?"

"Well . . . Soho." It was the most foreign place he could think of — for a hansom cab to go to.

The cabman's eyes stared down at him.

"Won't like it there, guv'nor."

"I don't have to like it," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said bitterly.

The cabman stared down at him a little longer. "Yus," he said. "Soho. Wardour Street like. Right you are, guv'nor."

The trap slammed shut, the whip flicked delicately beside the horse's right ear, and motion came to the hansom cab.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish sat perfectly still, his scarf tight around his thin neck and his stick between his knees and his gloved hands clasped on the crook of the stick. He stared mutely out into the mist, like an admiral on the bridge. The horse *clap-clopped* out of Grinling Crescent, through Belgrave Square, over to Whitehall, up to Trafalgar Square, across that to St. Martin's Lane.

It went neither fast nor slow, and yet it went as fast as anything else went. It moved without sound, except for the *clap-clap*, across a world that stank of gasoline fumes, and charred oil, that shrilled with whistles and hooted with horns.

And nobody seemed to notice it and nothing seemed to get in its way. That was rather amazing, Mr. Sutton-Cornish thought. But after all a hansom cab had nothing to do with that world. It was a ghost, an underlayer of time, the first writing on a palimpsest, brought out by ultraviolet light in a darkened room.

"Y'know," he said, speaking to the horse's rump, because there wasn't anything else there to speak to, "things might happen to a man, if a man would just let them happen."

The long whip flicked by Prince's ear as lightly as a trout fly flicking at a small dark pool under a rock.

"They already have," he added glumly.

The cab slowed along a curb, and the trap snapped open again.

"Well, 'ere we are, guv'nor. 'Ow about one of them little French dinners for eighteen pence? You know, guv'nor. Six courses of nothink at all. You 'ave one on me and then I 'ave one on you and we're still 'ungry. 'Ow about it?"

A very chill hand clutched at Mr. Sutton-Cornish's heart. Six-course dinners for eighteen pence? A hansom cab driver who said: "Wot war, guv'nor?" Twenty years ago, perhaps —

"Let me out here!" he said shrilly.

He threw the doors open, thrust money up at the face in the trap, hopped over the wheel to the sidewalk.

He didn't quite run, but he walked pretty fast and close to a dark wall and a little slinkingly. But nothing followed him, not even the *clop-clop* of the horse's hoofs. He swung around a corner into a narrow crowded street.

The light came from the open door of a shop. CURIOS AND ANTIQUES it said on the façade, in letters once gold, heavily Gothic in style. There was a flare on the sidewalk to attract attention and by this light he read the sign. The voice came from inside, from a little, plump man standing on a box who chanted over the heads of a listless crowd of silent, bored, foreign-looking men. The chanting voice held a note of exhaustion and futility.

"Now what am I bid, gents? Now what am I bid on this magnificent example of Oriental art? One pound starts the ball rolling, gents. One pound note coin of the realm. Now 'oo says a pound, gents? 'Oo says a pound?"

Nobody said anything. The little plump man on the box shook his head, wiped his face with a dirty handkerchief and drew a long breath. Then he saw Mr. Sutton-Cornish standing on the fringe of the little crowd.

"Ow about you, sir?" he pounced. "You look as if you'd a country 'ouse. Now that door's made for a country 'ouse. 'Ow about you, sir? Just give me a start like."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish blinked at him. "Eh? What's that?" he snapped.

The listless men smiled faintly and spoke among themselves without moving their thick lips.

"No offense, sir," the auctioneer chirped. "If you did 'ave a country 'ouse, that there door might be just what you could use."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish turned his head slowly, following the auctioneer's pointing hand, and looked for the first time at the bronze door.

It stood all by itself over against the left-hand wall of the nearly stripped shop. It stood about two feet out from the side wall, on its own base. It was a double door, apparently of cast bronze, although from its size that seemed impossible. It was heavily scrolled over with a welter of Arabic script in relief, an endless story that here found no listener, a procession of curves and dots that might have expressed anything from an anthology of the Koran to the by-laws of a well-organized harem.

The two leaves of the door were only part of the thing. It had a wide, heavy base below and a superstructure topped by a Moorish arch. From the meeting edge of the two leaves a huge key stuck out of a huge key-

hole, the sort of key a medieval jailer used to wear in enormous clanking bunches on a leather belt around his waist. A key from *The Yeomen of the Guard* — a comic-opera key.

"Oh . . . that," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said in the stillness. "Well, really, you know. I'm afraid not that, you know."

The auctioneer sighed. No hope had ever been smaller, probably, but at least it was worth a sigh. Then he picked up something which might have been carved ivory, but wasn't, stared at it pessimistically, and burst out again:

"Now 'ere, gents, I 'old in my 'and one of the finest examples —"

Mr. Sutton-Cornish smiled faintly and skimmed along the cluster of men until he came close to the bronze door.

He stood in front of it leaning on his stick, which was a section of polished rhinoceros hide over a steel core, dull mahogany in color, and a stick even a heavy man could have leaned on. After a while he reached forward idly and twisted the great key. It turned stubbornly, but it turned. A ring beside it was the doorknob. He twisted that, too, and tugged one half of the door open.

He straightened, and with a pleasantly idle gesture thrust his stick forward through the opening. And then, for the second time that evening, something incredible happened to him.

He wheeled sharply. Nobody was paying any attention. The auction was dead on its feet. The silent men were drifting out into the night. In a pause, hammering sounded at the back of the shop. The plump little auctioneer looked more and more as if he were eating a bad egg.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish looked down at his gloved right hand. There was no stick in it. There was nothing in it. He stepped to one side and looked behind the door. There was no stick there, on the dusty floor.

He had felt nothing. Nothing had jerked at him. The stick had merely passed part way through the door and then — it had merely ceased to exist.

He leaned down and picked up a piece of torn paper, wadded it swiftly into a ball, glanced behind him again and tossed the ball through the open part of the door.

Then he let out a slow sigh in which some neolithic rapture struggled with his civilized amazement. The ball of paper didn't fall to the floor behind the door. It fell, in midair, clean out of the visible world.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish reached his empty right hand forward and very slowly and carefully pushed the door shut. Then he just stood there, and licked his lips.

After a while; "Harem door," he said very softly. "Exit door of a harem. Now, that's an idea."

A very charming idea, too. The silken lady, her night of pleasure with the sultan over, would be conducted politely to that door and would casually step through it. Then nothing. No sobbing in the night, no broken hearts, no blackamoor with cruel eyes and a large scimitar, no knotted silk cord, no blood, no dull splash in the midnight Bosphorus. Merely nothing. A cool, clean, perfectly timed, and perfectly irrevocable absence of existence. Someone would close the door and lock it and take the key out, and for the time being that would be that.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish didn't notice the emptying of the shop. Faintly he heard its street door close, but without giving it any meaning. The hammering at the back stopped for a moment, voices spoke. Then steps came near. They were weary steps in the silence, the steps of a man who had had enough of that day, and of many such days. A voice spoke at Mr. Sutton-Cornish's elbow, an end-of-the-day voice.

"A very fine piece of work, sir. A bit out of my line — to be frank."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish didn't look at him, not yet. "Quite a bit out of anybody's line," he said gravely.

"I see it interests you, sir, after all."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish turned his head slowly. Down on the floor, off his box, the auctioneer was a mere wisp of a man. A shabby, unpresed red-eyed little man who had found life no picnic.

"Yes, but what would one *do* with it?" Mr. Sutton-Cornish asked throatily.

"Well — it's a door like any other, sir. Bit 'eavy. Bit queerlike. But still a door like any other."

"I wonder," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said, still throatily.

The auctioneer gave him a swift appraising glance, shrugged and gave it up. He sat down on an empty box, lit a cigarette and relaxed sloppily into private life.

"What are you asking for it?" Mr. Sutton-Cornish inquired, quite suddenly. "What are you asking for it, Mr. —"

"Skimp, sir. Josiah Skimp. Well, a £20 note, sir? Bronze alone ought to be worth that for art work." The little man's eyes were glittering again.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish nodded absently. "I don't know much about that."

"Ell of a lot of it, sir." Mr. Skimp hopped off his box, patted over and heaved the leaf of the door open, grunting. "Beats me 'ow it ever got 'ere. For seven-footers. No door for shrimps like me. Look, sir."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish had a rather ghastly presentiment, of course. But he didn't do anything about it. He couldn't. His tongue stuck in his throat and his legs were like ice. The comical contrast between the massiveness of the door and his own wisp of a body seemed to amuse Mr. Skimp.

His little, round face threw back the shadow of a grin. Then he lifted his foot and hopped.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish watched him — as long as there was anything to watch. In fact he watched much longer. The hammering at the back of the shop seemed to get quite thunderous in the silence.

Once more, after a long time, Mr. Sutton-Cornish bent forward and closed the door. This time he twisted the key and dragged it out and put it in his overcoat pocket.

"Got to do something," he mumbled. "Got to do — Can't let this sort of thing —" His voice trailed off and then he jerked violently, as though a sharp pain had shot through him. Then he laughed out loud, off key. Not a natural laugh. Not a very nice laugh.

"That was beastly," he said under his breath. "But amazingly funny."

He was still standing there rooted when a pale young man with a hammer appeared at his elbow.

"Mr. Skimp step out, sir — or did you notice? We're supposed to be closed up, sir."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish didn't look up at the pale young man with the hammer. Moving a clammy tongue he said:

"Yes . . . Mr. Skimp . . . stepped out."

The young man started to turn away. Mr. Sutton-Cornish made a gesture. "I've bought this door — from Mr. Skimp," he said. "Twenty pounds. Will you take the money — and my card?"

The pale young man beamed, delighted at personal contact with a sale. Mr. Sutton-Cornish drew out a note case, extracted four five-pound notes from it, also a formal calling card. He wrote on the card with a small, gold pencil. His hand seemed surprisingly steady.

"No. 14 Grinling Crescent," he said. "Have it sent tomorrow without fail. It's . . . it's very heavy. I shall pay the drayage, of course. Mr. Skimp will —" His voice trailed off again. Mr. Skimp wouldn't.

"Oh, that's all right, sir. Mr. Skimp is my uncle."

"Ah, that's too — I mean, well, take this ten-shilling note for yourself, won't you?"

Mr. Sutton-Cornish left the shop rather rapidly, his right hand clutching the big key down in his pocket.

An ordinary taxi took him home to dinner. He dined alone — after three whiskies. But he wasn't as much alone as he looked. He never would be any more.

It came the next day, swathed in sacking and bound about with cords, looking like nothing on earth.

Four large men in leather aprons perspired it up the four front steps and into the hall, with a good deal of sharp language back and forth. They had a light hoist to help them get it off their dray, but the steps almost beat them. Once inside the hall they got it on two dollies and after that it was just an average heavy, grunting job. They set it up at the back of Mr. Sutton-Cornish's study, across a sort of alcove he had an idea about.

He tipped them liberally, they went away, and Collins, the butler, left the front door open for a while to air the place through.

Carpenters came. The sacking was stripped off, and a framework was built around the door, so that it became part of a partition wall across the alcove. A small door was set in the partition. When the work was done and the mess cleared up Mr. Sutton-Cornish asked for an oil-can, and locked himself into his study. Then and only then he got out the big bronze key and fitted it again into the huge lock and opened the bronze door wide, both sides of it.

He oiled the hinges from the rear, just in case. Then he shut it again and oiled the lock, removed the key and went for a good long walk, in Kensington Gardens, and back. Collins and the first parlormaid had a look at it while he was out. Cook hadn't been upstairs yet.

"Beats me what the old fool's after," the butler said stonily. "I give him another week, Bruggs. If *she's* not back by then, I give him my notice. How about you, Bruggs?"

"Let him have his fun," Bruggs said, tossing her head. "That old sow he's married to —"

"Bruggs!"

"Tit-tat to you, Mr. Collins," Bruggs said and flounced out of the room.

Mr. Collins remained long enough to sample the whisky in the big square decanter on Mr. Sutton-Cornish's smoking table.

In a shallow, tall cabinet in the alcove behind the bronze door, Mr. Sutton-Cornish arranged a few odds and ends of old china and bric-a-brac and carved ivory and some idols in shiny black wood, very old and unnecessary. It wasn't much of an excuse for so massive a door. He added three statuettes in pink marble. The alcove still had an air of not being quite on to itself. Naturally the bronze door was never open unless the room door was locked.

In the morning Bruggs, or Mary the housemaid, dusted in the alcove, having entered, of course, by the partition door. That amused Mr. Sutton-Cornish slightly, but the amusement began to wear thin. It was about three weeks after his wife and Teddy left that something happened to brighten him up.

A large, tawny man with a waxed mustache and steady gray eyes called on him and presented a card that indicated he was Detective-sergeant Thomas Lloyd of Scotland Yard. He said that one Josiah Skimp, an auctioneer, living in Kennington, was missing from his home to the great concern of his family, and that his nephew, one George William Hawkins, also of Kennington, had happened to mention that Mr. Sutton-Cornish was present in a shop in Soho on the very night when Mr. Skimp vanished. In fact, Mr. Sutton-Cornish might even have been the last person known to have spoken to Mr. Skimp.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish laid out the whisky and cigars, placed his fingertips together and nodded gravely.

"I recall him perfectly, sergeant. In fact I bought that funny door over there from him. Quaint, isn't it?"

The detective glanced at the bronze door, a brief and empty glance.

"Out of my line, sir, I'm afraid. I do recall now something was said about the door. They had quite a job moving it. Very smooth whisky, sir. Very smooth indeed."

"Help yourself, sergeant. So Mr. Skimp has run off and lost himself. Sorry I can't help you. I really didn't know him, you know."

The detective nodded his large tawny head. "I didn't think you did, sir. The Yard only got the case a couple of days ago. Routine call, you know. Did he seem excited, for instance?"

"He seemed tired," Mr. Sutton-Cornish mused. "Very fed up — with the whole business of auctioneering, perhaps. I only spoke to him a moment. About that door, you know. A nice little man — but tired."

The detective didn't bother to look at the door again. He finished his whisky and allowed himself a little more.

"No family trouble," he said. "Not much money, but who has these days? No scandal. Not a melancholy type, they say. Odd."

"Some very queer types in Soho," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said mildly.

The detective thought it over. "Harmless, though. A rough district once, but not in our time. Might I ask what you was doing over there?"

"Wandering," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said. "Just wandering. A little more of this?"

"Well, now, really, sir, three whiskies in a morning . . . well, just this once and many thanks to you, sir."

Detective-sergeant Lloyd left — rather regretfully.

After he had been gone ten minutes or so, Mr. Sutton-Cornish got up and locked the study door. He walked softly down the long, narrow room and got the big bronze key out of his inside breast pocket, where he always carried it now.

The door opened noiselessly and easily now. It was well-balanced for its weight. He opened it wide, both sides of it.

"Mr. Skimp," he said very gently into the emptiness, "you are wanted by the police, Mr. Skimp."

The fun of that lasted him well on to lunch time.

In the afternoon Mrs. Sutton-Cornish came back. She appeared quite suddenly before him in the study, sniffed harshly at the smell of tobacco and scotch, refused a chair, and stood very solid and lowering just inside the closed door. Teddy stood beside her for a moment, then hurled himself at the edge of the rug.

"Stop that, you little beast. Stop that at once, darling," Mrs. Sutton-Cornish said. She picked Teddy up and stroked him. He lay in her arms and licked her nose and sneered at Mr. Sutton-Cornish.

"I find," Mrs. Sutton-Cornish said, in a voice that had the brittleness of dry suet, "after numerous very boring interviews with my solicitor, that I can do nothing without your help. Naturally I dislike asking for that."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish made ineffectual motions towards a chair and when they were ignored he leaned resignedly against the mantelpiece. He said he supposed that was so.

"Perhaps it has escaped your attention that I am still comparatively a young woman. And these are modern days, James."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish smiled wanly and glanced at the bronze door. She hadn't noticed it yet. Then he put his head on one side and wrinkled his nose and said mildly, without much interest:

"You're thinking of a divorce?"

"I'm thinking of very little else," she said brutally.

"And you wish me to compromise myself in the usual manner, at Brighton, with a lady who will be described in court as an actress?"

She glared at him. Teddy helped her glare. Their combined glare failed even to perturb Mr. Sutton-Cornish. He had other resources now.

"Not with that dog," he said carelessly, when she didn't answer.

She made some kind of furious noise, a snort with a touch of snarl in it. She sat down then, very slowly and heavily, a little puzzled. She let Teddy jump to the floor.

"Just what are you talking about, James?" she asked witheringly.

He strolled over to the bronze door, leaned his back against it and explored its rich protuberances with a fingertip. Even then she didn't see the door.

"You want a divorce, my dear Louella," he said slowly, "so that you

may marry another man. There's absolutely no point in it — with that dog. I shouldn't be asked to humiliate myself. Too useless. No man would marry that dog."

"James — are you attempting to blackmail me?" Her voice was rather dreadful. She almost bugled. Teddy sneaked across to the window curtains and pretended to lie down.

"And even if he would," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said with a peculiar quiet in his tone, "I oughtn't to make it possible. I ought to have enough human compassion —"

"James! How dare you! You make me physically sick with your insincerity!"

For the first time in his life James Sutton-Cornish laughed in his wife's face.

"Those are two or three of the silliest speeches I ever had to listen to," he said. "You're an elderly, ponderous and damn dull woman. Go out and buy yourself a gigolo, if you want someone to fawn on you. But don't ask me to make a beast of myself so that he can marry you and throw me out of my father's house. Now run along and take your miserable brown beetle with you."

She got up quickly, very quickly for her, and stood a moment almost swaying. Her eyes were as blank as a blind man's eyes. In the silence Teddy tore fretfully at a curtain, with bitter, preoccupied growls that neither of them noticed.

She said very slowly and almost gently: "We'll see how long you stay in your father's house, James Sutton-Cornish — *pauper*."

She moved very quickly the short distance to the door, went through and slammed it behind her.

The slamming of the door, an unusual event in that household, seemed to awaken a lot of echoes that had not been called upon to perform for a long time. So that Mr. Sutton-Cornish was not instantly aware of the small peculiar sound at his own side of the door, a mixture of sniffing and whimpering, with just a dash of growl.

Teddy. Teddy hadn't made the door. The sudden, bitter exit had for once caught him napping. Teddy was shut in — with Mr. Sutton-Cornish.

For a little while Mr. Sutton-Cornish watched him rather absently, still shaken by the interview, not fully realizing what had happened. The small, wet, black snout explored the crack at the bottom of the closed door. At moments, while the whimpering and sniffing went on, Teddy turned a reddish brown outjutting eye, like a fat wet marble, toward the man he hated.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish snapped out of it rather suddenly. He straightened and beamed. "Well, well, old man," he purred. "Here we are, and for once without the ladies."

Cunning dawned in his beaming eye. Teddy read it and slipped off under a chair. He was silent now, very silent. And Mr. Sutton-Cornish was silent as he moved swiftly along the wall and turned the key in the study door. Then he sped back toward the alcove, dug the key of the bronze door out of his pocket, unlocked and opened that — wide.

He sauntered back toward Teddy, beyond Teddy, as far as the window. "Here we are, old man. Jolly, eh? Have a shot of whisky, old man?"

Teddy made a small sound under the chair, and Mr. Sutton-Cornish sidled toward him delicately, bent down suddenly and lunged. Teddy made another chair, farther up the room. He breathed hard and his eyes stuck out rounder and wetter than ever, but he was silent, except for his breathing. And Mr. Sutton-Cornish, stalking him patiently from chair to chair, was as silent as the last leaf of autumn, falling in slow eddies in a windless copse.

At about that time the doorknob turned sharply. Mr. Sutton-Cornish paused to smile and click his tongue. A sharp knock followed. He ignored it. The knocking went on sharper and sharper and an angry voice accompanied it.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish went on stalking Teddy. Teddy did the best he could, but the room was narrow and Mr. Sutton-Cornish was patient and rather agile when he wanted to be. In the interests of agility he was quite willing to be undignified.

The knocking and calling out beyond the door went on, but inside the room things could only end one way. Teddy reached the sill of the bronze door, sniffed at it rapidly, almost lifted a contemptuous hind leg, but didn't because Mr. Sutton-Cornish was too close to him. He sent a low snarl back over his shoulder and hopped that disastrous sill.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish raced back to the room door, turned the key swiftly and silently, crept over to a chair and sprawled in it laughing. He was still laughing when Mrs. Sutton-Cornish thought to try the knob again, found the door yielded this time, and stormed into the room. Through the mist of his grisly, solitary laughter he saw her cold stare, then he heard her rustling about the room, heard her calling Teddy.

Then, "What's that thing?" he heard her snap suddenly. "What utter foolishness — Teddy! Come, mother's little lamb! Come, Teddy!"

Even in his laughter Mr. Sutton-Cornish felt the wing of a regret brush his cheek. Poor little Teddy. He stopped laughing and sat up, stiff and alert. The room was too quiet.

"Louella!" he called sharply.

No sound answered him.

He closed his eyes, gulped, opened them again, crept along the room staring. He stood in front of his little alcove for a long time, peering, peering through that bronze portal at the innocent little collection of trivia beyond.

He locked the door with quivering hands, stuffed the key down in his pocket, poured himself a stiff peg of whisky.

A ghostly voice that sounded something like his own, and yet unlike it, said out loud, very close to his ear:

"I didn't really intend anything like that . . . never . . . never . . . oh, never . . . or . . ." — after a long pause — "did I?"

Braced by the scotch he sneaked out into the hall and out of the front door without Collins seeing him. No car waited outside. As luck would have it she had evidently come up from Chinverly by train and taken a taxi. Of course they could trace the taxi — later on, when they tried. A lot of good that would do them.

Collins was next. He thought about Collins for some time, glancing at the bronze door, tempted a good deal, but finally shaking his head negatively.

"Not that way," he muttered. "Have to draw the line somewhere. Can't have a procession —"

He drank some more whisky and rang the bell. Collins made it rather easy for him.

"You rang, sir?"

"What did it sound like?" Mr. Sutton-Cornish asked, a little thick-tongued. "Canaries?"

Collins' chin snapped back a full two inches.

"The dowager won't be here to dinner, Collins. I think I'll dine out. That's all."

Collins stared at him. A grayness spread over Collins' face, with a little flush at the cheekbones.

"You allude to Mrs. Sutton-Cornish, sir?"

Mr. Sutton-Cornish hiccuped. "Who d'you suppose? Gone back to Chinverly to stew in her own juice some more. Ought to be plenty of it."

With deadly politeness Collins said: "I had meant to ask you, sir, whether Mrs. Sutton-Cornish would return here — permanently. Otherwise —"

"Carry on." Another hiccup.

"Otherwise I should not care to remain myself, sir."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish stood up and went close to Collins and breathed in his face. Haig & Haig. A good breath, of the type.

"Get out!" he rasped. "Get out now! Upstairs with you and pack your things. Your check will be ready for you. A full month. Thirty-two pounds in all, I believe?"

Collins stepped back and moved toward the door. "That will suit me perfectly, sir. Thirty-two pounds is the correct amount." He reached the door, spoke again before he opened it. "A reference from *you*, sir, will not be desired."

He went out, closing the door softly.

"Ha!" Mr. Sutton-Cornish said.

Then he grinned slyly, stopped pretending to be angry or drunk, and sat down to write the check.

He dined out that night, and the next night, and the next. Cook left on the third day, taking the kitchenmaid with her. That left Bruggs and Mary, the housemaid. On the fifth day Bruggs wept when she gave her notice.

"I'd rather go at once, sir, if you'll let me," she sobbed. "There's something creepylike about the house since cook and Mr. Collins and Teddy and Mrs. Sutton-Cornish left."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish patted her arm. "Cook and Mr. Collins and Teddy and Mrs. Sutton-Cornish," he repeated. "If only she could hear *that* order of precedence."

Bruggs stared at him, red-eyed. He patted her arm again. "Quite all right, Bruggs. I'll give you your month. And tell Mary to go, too. Think I'll close the house up and live in the south of France for a while. Now don't cry, Bruggs."

"No, sir." She bawled her way out of the room.

He didn't go to the south of France, of course. Too much fun being right where he was — alone at last in the home of his fathers. Not quite what they would have approved of, perhaps, except possibly the general. But the best he could do.

Almost overnight the house began to have the murmurs of an empty place. He kept the windows closed and the shades down. That seemed to be a gesture of respect he could hardly afford to omit.

Scotland Yard moves with the deadly dependability of a glacier, and at times almost as slowly. So it was a full month and nine days before Detective-sergeant Lloyd came back to No. 14 Grinling Crescent.

By that time the front steps had long since lost their white serenity. The apple-green door had acquired a sinister shade of gray. The brass saucer around the bell, the knocker, the big latch, all these were tarnished and stained, like the brass work of an old freighter limping around the Horn.

Those who rang the bell departed slowly, with backward glances, and Mr. Sutton-Cornish would be peeping out at them from the side of a drawn window shade.

He concocted himself weird meals in the echoing kitchen, creeping in after dark with ragged-looking parcels of food. Later he would slink out again with his hat pulled low and his overcoat collar up, give a quick glance up and down the street, then scramble off around the corner. The police constable on duty saw him occasionally at these maneuvers and rubbed his chin a good deal over the situation.

No longer a study even in withered elegance, Mr. Sutton-Cornish became a customer in obscure eating houses where draymen blew their soup on naked tables in compartments like horse stalls; in foreign cafés where men with blue-black hair and pointed shoes dined interminably over minute bottles of wine; in crowded, anonymous tea shops where the food looked and tasted as tired as the people who ate it.

He was no longer a perfectly sane man. In his dry, solitary, poisoned laughter there was the sound of crumbling walls. Even the pinched loafers under the arches of the Thames Embankment, who listened to him because he had sixpences, even these were glad when he passed on, stepping carefully in unshined shoes and lightly swinging the stick he no longer carried.

Then, late one night, returning softly out of the dull-gray darkness, he found the man from Scotland Yard lurking near the dirty front steps with an air of thinking himself hidden behind a lamppost.

"I'd like a few words with you, sir," he said, stepping forth briskly and holding his hands as though he might have to use them suddenly.

"Charmed, I'm sure," Mr. Sutton-Cornish chuckled. "Trot right in."

He opened the door with his latchkey, switched the light on, and stepped with accustomed ease over a pile of dusty letters on the floor.

"Got rid of the servants," he explained to the detective. "Always did want to be alone some day."

The carpet was covered with burned matches, pipe ash, torn paper, and the corners of the hall had cobwebs in them. Mr. Sutton-Cornish opened his study door, switched the light on in there and stood aside. The detective passed him warily, staring hard at the condition of the house.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish pushed him into a dusty chair, thrust a cigar at him, reached for the whisky decanter.

"Business or pleasure this time?" he inquired archly.

Detective-sergeant Lloyd held his hard hat on one knee and looked the cigar over dubiously. "Smoke it later, thank you, sir . . . Business, I take it. I'm instructed to make inquiries as to the whereabouts of Mrs. Sutton-Cornish."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish sipped whisky amiably and pointed at the decanter. He took his whisky straight now. "Haven't the least idea," he said. "Why? Down at Chinverly, I suppose. Country place. She owns it."

"It so 'appens she ain't," Detective-sergeant Lloyd said, slipping on an "h," which he seldom did any more. "Been a separation, I'm told," he added grimly.

"That's *our* business, old man."

"Up to a point, yes, sir. Granted. Not after her solicitor can't find her and she ain't anywhere anybody can find her. Not *then*, it ain't just your business."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish thought it over. "You might have something there — as the Americans say," he conceded.

The detective passed a large pale hand across his forehead and leaned forward.

"Let's 'ave it, sir," he said quietly. "Best in the long run. Best for all. Nothing to gain by foolishness. The law's the law."

"Have some whisky," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said.

"Not tonight I won't," Detective-sergeant Lloyd said grimly.

"She left me." Mr. Sutton-Cornish shrugged. "And because of that the servants left me. You know what servants are nowadays. Beyond that I haven't an idea."

"Oh yus I think you 'ave," the detective said, losing a little more of his West End manner. "No charges have been preferred, but I think you know all right, all right."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish smiled airily. The detective scowled and went on:

"We've taken the liberty of watching you, and for a gentleman of your position — you've been living a damn queer life, if I may say so."

"You may say so, and then you may get to hell out of my house," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said suddenly.

"Not so farst. Not yet I won't."

"Perhaps you would like to search the house."

"Per'aps I should. Per'aps I shall. No hurry there. Takes time. Sometimes takes shovels." Detective-sergeant Lloyd permitted himself to leer rather nastily. "Seems to me like people does a bit of disappearin' when you 'appen to be around. Take that Skimp. Now take Mrs. Sutton-Cornish."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish stared at him with lingering malice. "And in your experience, sergeant, where do people go when they disappear?"

"Sometimes they don't disappear. Sometimes somebody disappears them." The detective licked his strong lips, with a cat-like expression.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish slowly raised his arm and pointed to the bronze

door. "You wanted it, sergeant," he said suavely. "You shall have it. There is where you should look for Mr. Skimp, for Teddy the Pomeranian, and for my wife. There — behind that ancient door of bronze."

The detective didn't shift his gaze. For a long moment he didn't change expression. Then, quite amiably, he grinned. There was something else behind his eyes, but it was behind them.

"Let's you and me take a nice little walk," he said breezily. "The fresh air would do you a lot of good, sir. Let's—"

"There," Mr. Sutton-Cornish announced, still pointing with his arm rigid, "behind that door."

"Ah-ah," Detective-sergeant Lloyd wagged a large finger roguishly. "Been alone too much, you 'ave, sir. Thinkin' about things. Do it myself once in a while. Gets a fellow balmy in the crumpet like. Take a nice little walk with me, sir. We could stop somewhere for a nice—" The big, tawny man planted a forefinger on the end of his nose and pushed his head back and wiggled his little finger in the air at the same time. But his steady gray eyes remained in another mood.

"We'll look at my bronze door first."

Mr. Sutton-Cornish skipped out of his chair. The detective had him by the arm in a flash. "None of that," he said in a frosty voice. "Hold still."

"Key in here," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said, pointing at his breast pocket, but not trying to get his hand into it.

The detective got it out for him, stared at it heavily.

"All behind the door — on meathooks," Mr. Sutton-Cornish said. "All three. Little meathook for Teddy. Very large meathook for my wife. *Very* large meathook."

Holding him with his left hand, Detective-sergeant Lloyd thought it over. His pale brows were drawn tight. His large weathered face was grim — but skeptical.

"No harm to look," he said finally.

He marched Mr. Sutton-Cornish across the floor, pushed the bronze key into the huge antique lock, twisted the ring, and opened the door. He opened both sides of it. He stood looking into that very innocent alcove with its cabinet of knickknacks and absolutely nothing else. He became genial again.

"Meathooks, did you say, sir? Very cute, if I may say so."

He laughed, released Mr. Sutton-Cornish's arm and teetered on his heels.

"What the hell's it for?" he asked.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish doubled over very swiftly and launched his thin body with furious speed at the big detective.

"Take a little walk yourself — and find out!" he screamed.

Detective-sergeant Lloyd was a big and solid man and probably used to being butted. Mr. Sutton-Cornish could hardly have moved him six inches, even with a running start. But the bronze door had a high sill. The detective moved with the deceptive quickness of his trade, swayed his body just enough, and jarred his foot against the bronze sill.

If it hadn't been for that he would have plucked Mr. Sutton-Cornish neatly out of the air and held him squirming like a kitten, between his large thumb and forefinger. But the sill jarred him off balance. He stumbled a little, and swayed his body completely out of Mr. Sutton-Cornish's way.

Mr. Sutton-Cornish butted empty space — the empty space framed by that majestic door of bronze. He sprawled forward clutching — falling — clutching — across the sill —

Detective-sergeant Lloyd straightened up slowly, twisted his thick neck and stared. He moved back a little from the sill so that he could be perfectly certain the side of the door hid nothing from him. It didn't. He saw a cabinet of odd pieces of china, odds and ends of carved ivory and shiny black wood, and on top of the cabinet three little statuettes of pink marble.

He saw nothing else. There was nothing else in there to see.

"Gorblimey!" he said at last, violently. At least he thought he said it. Somebody said it. He wasn't quite sure. He was never absolutely sure about anything — after that night.

The whisky looked all right. It smelled all right, too. Shaking so that he could hardly hold the decanter Detective-sergeant Lloyd poured a little into a glass and took a sip in his dry mouth and waited.

After a little while he drank another spoonful. He waited again. Then he drank a stiff drink — a very stiff drink.

He sat down in the chair beside the whisky and took his large folded cotton handkerchief out of his pocket and unfolded it slowly and mopped his face and neck and behind his ears.

In a little while he wasn't shaking quite so much. Warmth began to flow through him. He stood up, drank some more whisky, then slowly and bitterly moved back down the room. He swung the bronze door shut, locked it, put the key down in his own pocket. He opened the partition door at the side, braced himself and stepped through into the alcove. He looked at the back of the bronze door. He touched it. It wasn't very light in there, but he could see that the place was empty, except for the silly-looking cabinet. He came out again shaking his head.

"Can't be," he said out loud. "Not a chance. Not 'arf a chance."

Then, with the sudden unreasonableness of the reasonable man, he flew into a rage.

"If I get 'ooked for this," he said between his teeth, "I get 'ooked."

He went down to the dark cellar, rummaged around until he found a hand ax and carried it back upstairs.

He hacked the woodwork to ribbons. When he was done the bronze door stood alone on its base, jagged wood all around it, but not holding it any longer. Detective-sergeant Lloyd put the hand ax down, wiped his hands and face on his big handkerchief, and went in behind the door. He put his shoulder to it and set his strong, yellow teeth.

Only a brutally determined man of immense strength could have done it. The door fell forward with a heavy rumbling crash that seemed to shake the whole house. The echoes of that crash died away slowly, along infinite corridors of unbelief.

Then the house was silent again. The big man went out into the hall and had another look out of the front door.

He put his coat on, adjusted his hard hat, folded his damp handkerchief carefully and put it in his hip pocket, lit the cigar Mr. Sutton-Cornish had given him, took a drink of whisky and swaggered to the door.

At the door he turned and deliberately sneered at the bronze door, lying fallen but still huge in the welter of splintered wood.

"To 'ell with you, 'ooever you are," Detective-sergeant Lloyd said. "I ain't no bloody primrose."

He shut the house door behind him. A little high fog outside, a few dim stars, a quiet street with lighted windows. Two or three cars of expensive appearance, very likely chauffeurs lounging in them, but no one in sight.

He crossed the street at an angle and walked along beside the tall iron railing of the park. Faintly through the rhododendron bushes he could see the dull glimmer of the little ornamental lake. He looked up and down the street and took the big bronze key out of his pocket.

"Make it a good 'un," he told himself softly.

His arm swept up and over. There was a minute splash in the ornamental lake, then silence. Detective-sergeant Lloyd walked on calmly, puffing at his cigar.

Back at the C.I.D. he gave his report steadily, and for the first and last time in his life, there was something besides truth in it. Couldn't raise anybody at the house. All dark. Waited three hours. Must all be away.

The inspector nodded and yawned.

The Sutton-Cornish heirs eventually pried the estate out of Chancery and opened up No. 14 Grinling Crescent and found the bronze door lying in a welter of dust and splintered wood and matted cobwebs. They stared at it goggle-eyed, and when they found out what it was, sent for

dealers, thinking there might be a little money in it. But the dealers sighed and said no, no money in that sort of thing now. Better ship it off to a foundry and have it melted down for the metal. Get so much a pound. The dealers departed noiselessly with wry smiles.

Sometimes when things are a little dull in the Missing Persons section of the C.I.D. they take the Sutton-Cornish file out and dust it off and look through it sourly and put it away again.

Sometimes when Inspector — formerly Detective-sergeant — Thomas Lloyd is walking along an unusually dark and quiet street he will whirl suddenly, for no reason at all, and jump to one side with a swift anguished agility.

But there isn't really anybody there, trying to butt him.

Preview of a Preview

Theodore Sturgeon, as original and imaginative a writer of science-fantasy as we know is, at last, after an unaccountable five-year gap since *WITHOUT SORCERY*, bringing out another volume of his collected short stories, to be called *E PLURIBUS UNICORN*. For the lead story and key of this collection, he has written a strange tale of wonder which is outstanding even among Sturgeon stories; and F&SF will have the privilege of publishing, next month, this entrancing legend of magic, cruelty, love, beauty . . . and justice. We think you'll find *The Silken-Swift* a singularly poetic and moving story; and we're proud that we thus have the honor of giving you a preview of what's sure to be one of the most distinguished collections in many years.

We're also particularly happy to announce the first appearance in F&SF of Clifford D. Simak, winner of the 1953 International Fantasy Award, with *Shadow Show*, a fine novelet of scientific research into the very nature of life itself. This November issue (on the stands in early October) will also include the F&SF debuts of two long-reliable imaginative writers, Robert Abernathy and Mindret Lord, and stories by such ever-welcome F&SF regulars as Mildred Clingerman, Kris Neville and Idris Seabright.

Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

THERE'S A LEGEND, carefully disseminated by advocates trying to bolster the prestige of science fiction, that most s.f. writers are themselves highly trained and informed scientists. We've even been guilty of this exaggeration ourselves, and we're sorry; the legend's unfortunate in that it scares off a great many good writers who become overaware of their own inadequacy and form the notion that it takes at least an M.S. to sell a science fiction story.

Now the actual facts are that, aside from a few Asimovs and Taines, most s.f. writers are like Gilbert's Major General Stanley — plucky and adventury, but with technical knowledge that has hardly been brought down to the beginning of the century. We are constantly amazed at the flagrant technical howlers that turn up in manuscripts submitted by well-established professionals, and even in the published books which we read as reviewers.

By which we do *not* mean to imply that we ourselves are paragons of scientific knowledge. To be honest, we have, between us, the barest minimum adequate to an educated man in this century — so that it's particularly startling that any should have even less. But we do know, as do the best of the writers who have never been near MIT or Caltech, how and where to look up the facts we may need. (Which we sometimes neglect to do; see a shamefaced apology elsewhere in this issue concerning our July cover.)

Science fiction writers have been exceedingly fortunate — as have the readers who like to keep up with or even a step ahead of their favorite storytellers — in the wealth of recent factual books on the scientific and technological probabilities of the future, books that should stand at the right hand of every honest author as he writes and of every sceptical enthusiast as he reads. It might seem that, after such books as the classics by Willy Ley and Arthur C. Clarke and Cornelius Ryan's symposium from *Collier's*, there was little need for further factual volumes on space travel; but two recent volumes make an imperative claim for inclusion in this right-hand reference shelf: Patrick Moore's *A GUIDE TO THE MOON* (Norton) and Heinz Haber's *MAN IN SPACE* (Bobbs-Merrill).

The two books have a good deal in common: Both are highly readable expositions of technical subjects, popular in appeal without condescension; both are reasonably priced in view of their length and unusually attractive design, printing and illustrations; and each, while repeating a good deal of familiar material, is invaluable for a more detailed discussion of one specific topic than has yet appeared elsewhere for the general reader.

Mr. Moore is obviously in love with the moon and manages to communicate his love infectiously. He gives you every known detail about every single feature of lunar topography, plus an interesting history of lunar observation and some fresh speculations, of which the most provocative is the theory (apparently well substantiated) that the moon may have an infinitesimally faint atmosphere, possibly enough for the protective combustion of meteors, the bouncing of radio waves and the sustenance of some lichenous form of life. There are plentiful photographs and charts and (what's coming to be a rarity even in books intended for reference) an admirably detailed index.

Dr. Haber you have encountered before as a contributor to the Ryan symposium and to Marberger's *SPACE MEDICINE*. He has much more to say in his first solo book, and unaccountably says it much better; there's a pleasing style here (even a touch of humor) absent from his contributions to symposia. Like Mr. Moore, he expends part of his book on material already covered thoroughly by Clarke, Ley, *et al.*; but nowhere else have we seen so much detailed material on the latest advances in that new art, space medicine. (There is now even an American Space Medical Association!) Dr. Haber would be the first to admit that only experience can tell us everything about man's physiological and psychological reactions to existence off of this earth; but the probable conclusions here reached are so plausible and cover so many hitherto unexplored aspects (see especially a fine section on kinesthetic receptors) that every future fictional description of human life in space will (or at least should) owe an enormous debt to Haber's researches. Surprisingly from a German author, the book has no scholarly apparatus: no notes on the sources of quotations, no bibliography, and no index.

One might think the reference shelf should include Peter Penzoldt's *THE SUPERNATURAL IN FICTION* (British Book Centre), since it's the first full-length book on the subject since 1917 and especially since it includes a section on science fiction. But this Ph.D. thesis for the University of Geneva was written by a man who had read a great deal of psychiatry and a small handful of fantasy collections; the number of factual errors, caprices in judgment and lacunae in knowledge is such that we frankly can't see why the book was ever published. It must be awfully easy to get a Ph.D. in Geneva.

Arthur C. Clarke, whose name probably appears in this column twice as often as any other, turns up this month as a fiction writer, with his most ambitious novel to date, *CHILDHOOD'S END* (Ballantine), and we're honestly not quite sure what to make of it. It's a history of the human race from the late Twentieth to the mid-Twenty-second Century and its extraordinary development under the benevolent supervision of invisible alien Overlords; to tell more would be to spoil some neatly arranged surprises. Stapledonian is the word for the scope of its historic concepts and also for the quality of its prose and thinking; but as a novel it hangs in curious imbalance between its large-scale history and a number of episodic small-scale stories — as though *LAST AND FIRST MEN* were interspersed with fragmentary chapters from *ODD JOHN* and *SIRIUS*. Let's say an awkward and imperfect book, but still contributory evidence that Clarke is one of the few major novelists in science fiction.

Of other recent novels, Gerald Kersh's *THE SECRET MASTERS* (Ballantine) is largely a wonderfully told Hitchcock-like suspense-pursuit novel, which explodes into some wild mad-scientist fantasy as lurid as it is painfully dated. Elizabeth Cadell's *CRYSTAL CLEAR* (Morrow) is not an out-and-out fantasy like her joyously memorable *BRIMSTONE IN THE GARDEN*; but it does have a subplot involving genuine ESP, which is enough to justify us in recommending what is otherwise a beautifully deft and charming novel of light love and quiet British character-humor. ESP and other psi phenomena are the basis of Charlotte Haldane's *THE SHADOW OF A DREAM* (Roy), intended as a thesis-novel protesting Great Britain's Fraudulent Mediums Act but achieving nothing beyond cliché-spangled dullness at inordinate length. Ayn Rand's *ANTHEM* (Caxton) is also a thesis-novel (or rather a short novelet), using the overworked theme of individual-revolt-against-future-regimented-state to advance the notion that brotherly love and social obligation are a poison and that man's only hope lies in complete selfishness. The story was published in England in 1938, and Miss Rand implies that a sinister conspiracy of purveyors of brotherhood has prevented its American hardcover publication until now. One can only regret that the conspiracy finally broke down.

Two of the all-time top fantasy novels are now available in painlessly inexpensive reprint editions: A. E. van Vogt's *SLAN* (Dell), which one of your editors used in 1940 to convert the other to modern science fiction, and which you might find equally useful in missionary work; and John Dickson Carr's *THE DEVIL IN VELVET* (Bantam), that incomparable blend of time travel (to the lusty golden days of Charles II) with strict detection.

In fantasy short stories, the most exciting news is the fictional debut (at the age of 80!) of Nobel prize-winner Bertrand Russell. Purists may cavil

that only one of the five stories in *SATAN IN THE SUBURBS* (Simon & Schuster) is fantasy or science fiction; but the others are, if theoretically "possible," so delightfully fantastic in concept and execution that there'll be no caviling here. Lord Russell has created a wondrous parody-pastiche Victorian style and employed it to tell some of the maddest Milesian episodes ever invented, from a Corsican conspiracy which all but takes over the world to a war with Mars unlike any other you've read. This is a tremendously funny and enchanting book, demanding reading aloud and frequent rereading. It's hardly similar to anything else published; but if you like Max Beerbohm, Robert Louis Stevenson (in his *NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS* vein) or Arthur Machen, there's immeasurable joy awaiting you here.

AHEAD OF TIME (Ballantine) is as good as you'd expect any collection of Henry Kuttner's stories to be — which means, of course, just about as good as the modern magazine science-fantasy story can get. These ten stories originally appeared from 1942 to 1953, as by Kuttner, Kuttner and Moore, Padgett, and Liddell (a mere sampling of the nineteen Kuttner by-lines!). There's no particular form to the collection, and at least two of the stories have been recently reprinted elsewhere; but we hope this is the first of countless such inexpensive packages of the work of one of s.f.'s most literate and intelligent storytellers.

A helpful if anonymous reader calls our attention to the fact that Milton Crane's *50 GREAT SHORT STORIES* (Bantam) is largely a fantasy anthology, and of very high quality. Many of the stories will be familiar to the aficionado; but the book's a noble bargain (almost a quarter of a million words for 35¢!), both fantasy and non-fantasy are acutely chosen — and it's fascinating to see how large fantasy bulks in the picture of the short story as selected on the advice of 500 professors of English literature.

Reviewers should know better than to make any positive factual statements without consulting the pantomnemoniac Forrest J. Ackerman. We rashly stated last month that Olaf Stapledon's *LAST AND FIRST MEN* had never before appeared in the United States; but Mr. Ackerman informs us that it was published in 1931 by Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith — a fact omitted on the copyright page of Basil Davenport's splendid Stapledon omnibus, *TO THE END OF TIME*.



Bill Brown relates the brief history of the last Tronk of Dwarpu, that island kingdom in a planet of arangats, stormy seas . . . and ghosts. This last Tronk should have ruled over a great people, triumphant in war, fat in peace . . . but long before he was born the Earth men flashed across the sky to Dwarpu. So, the trader destroyed the savage, as he always does, and the handful of sickly people that was the Tronk's "nation" had nothing to redeem their degradation but legends, chants and their unquiet dead.

The Tronk and the Trumpet

by BILL BROWN

THE GREAT TRONK was dead. His 30 paddlers carried his war canoe with the high carved prow like a coffin and they stowed it in a dry place under a cliff overhang.

The priest took the Tronk's thunder trumpet and put a spell on it with runk scales and the dried entrails of an arangat.

"Who blows the horn will wake the dead. Who blows the horn will hear the rattle of dry bones! Beware!"

The trumpet was made from the larynx of a thunder lizard. It was fluted on the outer lip and spiny on the crown. When the Great Tronk had blown it, the blast came shattering back from the cliffs of Dwarpu and his men with their war clubs and spears of ander bone drove the invaders crabwise back into the sea. On raids to other islands over the stormy and dangerous seas, the Great Tronk thundered the horn and when his enemies heard it, they ran from their towns and beaches, leaving their women and ornaments of shell behind.

Now the Great Tronk was dead. The women of Dwarpu wrapped their king in white cloth and the 30 paddlers dragged the body to a hollow log in a niche high up on the cliff. Then the people of Dwarpu chiseled away the footholds in the cliff and they took down the wooden ladders. They burned the ladders in the roasting pits and cooked three of their enemies. The dancers put fern branches on their heads and danced to the drums and the chants of the Great Tronk's raids in the war canoe. The smell of wood smoke and burned flesh filled the gorge as far up as the cataract.

The people chiseled away the footholds in the stone and they burned the ladders, not to keep away grave robbers, but to keep the Tronk up there. They wanted no ghosts wandering their valley at night and moaning in the fern trees.

After the Great Tronk there were more kings of Dwarpu but the war canoe lay rotting under the cliff overhang and the thunder trumpet hung from the rafters of the council house for no one dared to blow it because of the spell. No one blew it when the first Earth men came. They came across the seas, from their own island, riding in hollow meteors.

No one blew it when the Earth men brought their music-makers, their bright cloth that didn't wear out and their strange pictures that moved, trading them for ander oil. No one blew it when the wise men of Earth came with shovels and picks to search the old towns and graves for history. But they weren't wise enough to find the grave of the Great Tronk.

No one blew the trumpet when the Earth plagues came that set the people of Dwarpu to coughing, and a dozen thin ribbed corpses a day were thrown to the fat snakes in the sea that lived off carrion.

Finally there were only three houses and seven people in the valley of Dwarpu, not counting the trader. There was Findar who should have been the Tronk, and his wife, Atris; their two sons who hunted arangats in the crags all day, the broom woman and her sick husband and blind Timi. There was also Pickering, the Earth man who had the trading store near the landing place at the end of the valley.

Findar, the man who should have been the Tronk, walked down the trail fast because it was getting dark and ghosts could be abroad. He carried the ancient thunder trumpet he had just found in the musty loft of his house, hanging from the rafters by a string. He knew from the old chants that it must have been the Great Tronk's and it would be worth something at the store. He carried it dangling from a piece of bark rope, holding it away from him like something hot.

When he came to the narrow trail around the cliff overhang where the war canoe was, he stopped and peered back in the dark place. The ancient craft was just as the Great Tronk's paddlers had left it, only now it was half-covered with vines, and lichen grew on the thwarts. The carved bird head was gone. The Earth men had long since sawed it off and carried it away with them.

Findar walked on quietly, on his toes, looking behind him. He stumbled on a rock in the path and the thunder trumpet bumped against his leg. Findar sucked in his breath, waiting for the thunder or lightning or for the land to shake. Nothing happened. He breathed again, thinking it was

only forbidden to blow on it, not to touch it. That must have been what the old chants said. But the rest of the way to Pickering's store, he carried it carefully at the end of its string.

Pickering the trading agent sat on the stone porch of the store, staring out over the darkening sea that stretched beyond the valley. Off on the horizon he could see one of the black storms that made the Earth men shun this sea and do their traveling by rocket. And yet, he knew, the ancients of Dwarpu had dared voyages to other islands. It must have taken as much courage as taking off for another star when space was unknown.

Pickering looked up at the sky, trying to see the first star. In a few minutes they would all be out and he could try to pick the one that might be Earth, or really the sun because they said you couldn't actually see the Earth from here, only the sun and it looked like almost any other star.

So here he was stuck on this stinking little planet. Just the place for a fat man with a bad heart, they said when they signed him up as the company's agent and then they shipped him off to this little island with empty tanks for ander oil and a store full of junk for the natives.

The best spot on the planet, they told him. The people were completely humanoid but a little primitive. They used to be cannibals but the traders and missionaries had cleaned the place up.

Why, you'll make enough on the side, gathering curios for the museum, to come home rich, they said. Well, he had done pretty well on the three-legged stone gods and a few carved bowls and the old war drums that he had sent back on the trading company ships. But ander oil, ha! There hadn't been a gallon of ander oil brought in in a month and the tanks weren't half full. It'd be another year before a ship came with news and things from home and maybe a bottle. They'd just left him here to rot with this lazy, stinking remnant of a race of cannibals.

It was very nearly dark when Pickering looked away from the sea and saw Findar coming down the trail, his shirt white against his dark skin, carrying something at the end of a string.

Findar came slowly now. The last time Pickering wouldn't even let him in the store because he brought no ander oil and he was a little afraid of the fat man with the stubbly beard and the dirty clothes. Findar stood at the bottom of the steps, hesitating, and Pickering nodded sourly. Findar gathered his breath for a rush of words.

"Look see I bring thunder trumpet much good you buy!"

Pickering stood up trying to see the thing Findar was carrying.

"Come with me," he said, leading the way into the store. He clicked on a single light over the counter. "If it's really the voice box of a lizard," Pickering said, "maybe I can take it off your hands."

"From thunder lizard," Findar said.

Pickering tried to be casual. You don't let these people know the worth of what they've got. He took the bone larynx in his hand and studied it carefully. It was old, all right. The bone was brown and polished from handling. If this was really the old trumpet the legends told about, you could get a lot of money for it. Maybe enough to go back home to Earth. . . .

"I thought you'd already traded off all your doodads, Findar, because you're too lazy to make oil."

"Good trumpet," Findar said. "You buy?"

Pickering tested the hardness of the bone with his thumbnail.

"What do you want for it, Findar? A can of food? One of the magic kind — that gets hot by itself?"

Findar shook his head. "No food. Seven harmonica."

"Seven harmonicas! What in the name of a three-legged god do you want seven harmonicas for?"

"Sad people need harmonica."

"Sad people! The reason you're sad is because you're so damned lazy. Earth people have treated you pretty nice, bringing all this trading truck up here for you. We civilized you, that's what we did, and are you grateful enough to make oil for us? No."

Findar touched the trumpet. "You buy?"

Pickering put on a pessimistic scowl. "It's an old bone. I doubt if it will still blow."

"Sure blow," Findar said. "Blow too much noise. You blow see."

"Blow it yourself, Findar," Pickering said. "I wouldn't put that filthy thing to my mouth."

Findar stood back from the shell, the sudden fear of the forbidden on him again. "No, no! You blow. Bad for me to blow!"

"Superstition!" Pickering said. "Superstition's been the ruin of you all. Now I'll give you one harmonica for it but first I want to hear you tootle it." His grin was sloppy and toothless.

Findar plastered his hands against the wall behind him and he shook his head, his eyes wide and staring.

"Come on, Findar," Pickering said, pushing the bone at him. "Once you blow it you'll know it can't hurt you — except maybe to poison you with its own filth."

"No!"

Pickering pulled the harmonica off a card behind the counter. He held it up in front of Findar in the lamp light and he pushed the trumpet into Findar's ribs. "Now do you want the harmonica or not? I'll not stay up the night arguing!"

Findar's hands closed around the bone trumpet and he lifted it. He closed his eyes and his mouth found the blow hole but fear paralyzed his lungs and the breath wouldn't come. He opened his eyes. Pickering was peering close into his face, his grin grotesque in the lamp light.

"Well?"

Findar drew his breath again and this time he blew with all the force he had, trying to get a vibration from his lips. When it came out, the sound was a squawk like an arangat with a spear in its belly. It degenerated into a faint squeak and a rush of air. The noise frightened something under the porch and it scuttered out into the leaves. Pickering laughed.

The caged vurry in the back room of the store moved in his sleep but didn't waken at the rusty sound. Beyond that, the sound was absorbed by the fern trees and whisper of the wind.

But there was some overtone, some shrill, piercing vibration that the mortal ear couldn't hear.

The bones of the Tronk moved.

A wind came along the cliff and the white cloth around him fluttered and the wind tore it. The Tronk moved his green bones and the fingers with the dry skin wrapped on them moved and he pulled the white tunic closer. The Tronk made a mighty wrench with his shoulder bones and he sat up in his hollow log.

The Tronk rose tall and terrible in his white tunic. He strode to the edge of the niche.

Light from three moons was striking the cliff and the cataract gleamed as white as the belly of a sea snake. The Tronk listened for shouts and the sounds of fighting but there was nothing but the soft sound of the wind off the sea in the fern trees. There was no great fire in the town, only the moonlight on the tops of the trees. Yet the thunder trumpet had been blown and there had been a desperation in its summons.

Years had changed the face of the cliff. Where the stone footholds had been chiseled away there was now a small gully and a few rock shrubs growing. The Great Tronk worked his way down, searching out scanty footholds with his bony feet. He found he had almost no weight now because his bones were dry and hollow.

So the Great Tronk came down from the crags in the night. He searched in the rotting leaves until he found phosphorus and he jammed the glowing stuff in his eye holes because that was the custom of all specters. He strode down the path where the old ander beds used to flourish along the stream and now all he saw were vines and tangles. He stopped at the edge of the old town where the squat stone gods had stood in a circle, their lewd faces all

turned toward the center. But the gods were gone. With the instinct of a specter, he headed for the dark place where the war bird lay.

It was dark when Findar left the trading store. He walked the path, tonguing the fast rhythm of "Jesus Lover of My Soul" on the new harmonica to keep up his courage. The people of Dwarpu seldom walked at night because the spirits of the old ones could often be heard moaning in the tops of the fern trees and vurry birds would cry shrilly at night when no vurry birds were out.

Findar stopped playing when the trail came close to the cliff overhang where the war canoe was. Once there had been a trail around this evil place so night travelers could avoid it, but in these days few walked at night and the detour was overgrown. Findar stopped and peered into the dark and he shoved the harmonica into his back pocket.

The sawed-off prow of the war canoe reached out almost to the trail and Findar was glad the hideous bird head was gone. He whistled softly and started to walk fast past the canoe.

You don't think when you go past there. You don't look after you start. You only feel the stony path under your feet and the pebbles and sticks. If you hear a rock lizard in the leaves you don't listen to it but you keep on and if you hear a moaning in the fern trees you close your ears. You think of the roast arangat you will have when the boys spear one and you think of the bright-new harmonica in your back pocket. When you see the phosphorus in two round balls close together by the prow of the canoe, you look at it but you don't let yourself see it and even when you have to walk close to the white mass with its phosphorus eyes you walk fast and strong and you think harder of roast arangat and the gay music you can have with the harmonica. When the white mass reaches out and grasps you by the arm you close your eyes and you turn cold and you stand without moving until the thorn bush that has you by the shirt lets go but it isn't a thorn bush and you feel the air going out of your lungs and you think you will never breathe again. You try to run but the thing holds you and you have to turn and look into the green phosphorus eyes of the specter.

The ghost tightened his bony grip. A little moonlight came through the fern trees and Findar could see the stiff face in the light. The gaunt jaw opened and closed but no sound came. Far off was a sound like a voice from a hollow log but it was more like the wind in the fern tree tops. The specter tightened his grip like a question.

Findar tried to keep his teeth from chattering.

"Pickering made me blow it!" he said. "He made me blow it but I didn't blow it hard enough to — to wake the dead!"

The dry jaw flapped. The specter seemed to be trying desperately to speak, and watching him, Findar lost some of his fear and he felt a great sorrow for the Tronk. He was so old, so gaunt and he had no breath to speak with.

Findar wrenched his arm free and he was surprised at how easy it was.

"Well, the thunder trumpet was mine to sell, wasn't it? I'm the king today just like you used to be, or I would be if I had a kingdom. I could sell the trumpet if I wanted to just like the other things. . . ."

Findar stopped, realizing he was saying too much. The Great Tronk turned, leaning back a little and he turned his blazing eyes toward Pickering's store, and then he turned back toward Findar. There was no expression in the phosphorus eyes, but Findar could feel the accusation and he shuffled his feet a little on the dirt path.

"What if I did sell the old things? What good would the stone gods be to us now and the ornaments and the bowls and the war clubs? What good would they be to seven people who are going to die?"

The jaw sagged open and quivered and then clapped closed again with the sound of two stones striking. The specter turned again in the direction of the trading store. A vurry bird cried shrill and suddenly in the night.

"No, they aren't there, Tronk," Findar said. "Pickering shipped them all away to an island called Earth. Everything went but the thunder trumpet. Even the head of the war canoe is gone."

The Tronk turned again with the slow stone motion of a grinding wheel and Findar stared into the eye holes. The Tronk stretched out his arm in the direction of the store and flapped his dry jaw.

"What is it, Tronk? What is it you're trying to tell me?"

Suddenly the Tronk was gone and Findar was staring into the shadows.

"Pah!" Findar said. "An old sack full of bones and he didn't frighten me." He laughed and his voice came back to him in echoes, hollow and ridiculous. Findar walked with a confident stride now along the trail toward the village because it wasn't every man who could talk back to a specter, and the specter of the Great Tronk at that.

Findar came to where the old town was in the days of the Great Tronk and he walked slowly over the broken streets. You could see it had been a great town then with row after row of stone platforms for the houses and the big platform where the ancient council house had been, but now there were only vines and lizards among the ruins. It must have been fine being a king in those days, Findar thought. He shut his eyes and tried to hear the sounds of a busy town, the tapping of the cloth makers, the whisper of grinding wheels, the children crying, but it was a dead town now and silent.

Findar walked on to the old court where the ancient throne was, a boulder half as tall as a tall man, flat on top and worn smooth by generations of Tronks; the paved court where warriors danced out the stories of their raids, and the fire pits for roasting men after a war. Now the pits were empty and caved in. The stone wall behind the throne had fallen and fern trees grew where the Tronk's house had been.

Findar pulled himself up on top of the old throne and he sat with his legs folded under him like a king should sit.

"Findar Tronk," he thought. "Findar Tronk, the last king of Dwarpul!"

He took out his harmonica and tried to play it but the sound was thin and disappointing. What a king needs, he thought, is a good thunder trumpet. Something to rattle the stones down from the cliffs. Something to make people know there's a king here!

Findar sat cross-legged on the throne trying to think what it was the old Tronk was trying to tell him with his old flapping jaw and no voice. What would the Great Tronk do if he were king today — king of six people who were going to die? A king who had sold their gods? A king who . . .

Findar sat still on the throne, part of the stone, his head raised in the direction of the cliffs. Slowly he raised his arms and cried to the Great Tronk to make him a sign. The sign came at once. Thunder crashed in the crags and a vurry bird cried and a fern fruit thumped down in the night all at the same time.

Findar slapped the harmonica in his hand to knock out the spit. He leaped down from the stone and he ran back toward the store. He ran back past the war canoe with no fear at all and he ran up the stone steps of the store.

There was no light inside, so Pickering was asleep in the back. Findar tried the door but the padlock only rattled. He stepped back and then he came against the door with all his force, shoulder first. There was a crash of wood and Findar staggered across the floor almost to the counter. A little moonlight came through the broken door and Findar could see the thunder trumpet on a shelf below the cans of the strange Earth food.

Findar went down the steps with the trumpet in his hand. He strode down the path with long steps, fast, knocking the bushes out of his way with his arm. He came to the three houses where his wife, Atris, and his two sons and the old broom woman and her husband and blind Timi were asleep.

Findar crowded air into his lungs until they ached and he put his mouth to the blow hole of the trumpet. He blew through his lips and the sound from the trumpet thundered through the houses and against the cliffs and the vurry birds squawked. Findar blew it again and he blew three long

blasts. The people of Dwarpu came out of their houses and the first were Findar's two tall sons with their hunting spears with the Earth knife blades. Findar blew the trumpet again to show them he was their Tronk. He made them all come with him, even blind Timi and the sick husband of the broom woman. He led the people down the trail to the old throne. He hoisted himself up on the stone and sat cross-legged, his arms folded across his chest.

The people of Dwarpu came close and they looked up at Findar, waiting, and he saw for the first time they weren't six people ready to die, but a nation and he was its Tronk.

Suddenly there was a dark movement in the shadows and Pickering came out into the moonlight, his trousers hastily suspended over his undershirt.

Pickering came close across the stones and he jabbed his finger toward Findar on the throne.

"See here!" he shouted. "What goes on?"

"I am Findar Tronk," Findar said sternly. "You have no business here, Pickering!" He spoke in the tongue of Dwarpu, not caring whether Pickering understood or not.

"You broke my door, Findar," Pickering shouted, "and you stole my trumpet!"

Findar sat straight on the throne and folded his arms.

"You'll go to jail, that's what!" Pickering yelled. "Or you'll be many a weary day making ander oil to pay for that door. Now give me that trumpet before you get into any more mischief with it!"

Findar made no move to hand over the trumpet that was in his lap, but his two sons moved closer to Pickering with their hunting spears. Pickering looked around and wet his lips.

"You're threatening the representative of the Earth government," he said, "and that means jail for every one of you!"

Findar stood up on the throne. He pointed at Pickering and sent his voice along the way his arm pointed.

"The thunder trumpet is mine!" he shouted. "I am the Tronk and everything in Dwarpu is mine, and no man can call the Tronk thief!"

Pickering glanced again at the moonlight reflecting from the knife blades on the spears. He looked at the hard faces of the people of Dwarpu.

"It was you, Pickering, who made me sell the things," Findar screamed. "All but the war canoe and you didn't want that because it was full of wood worms and rot. You are the thief, Pickering. You stole our gods and our drums and our war clubs!"

Then Findar pitched his voice below the sound of the wind in the fern

trees. He leaned forward on the throne toward the trader. "And Pickering, you'll go back now to that island called Earth and bring them all back!"

Pickering looked for half a minute into Findar's face and what he saw there made him take two stiff steps backwards. He glanced at the leaning spears and then Pickering the trader turned and ran for the store as though he had seen a specter himself.

The people of Dwarpu watched him go and then Findar raised his arm at the two sons and told them to go — go get Pickering and bring him back.

The boys loped down the trail, their hunting spears aslant. Findar ordered his people to get dry branches of the fern trees and wood and build a great fire in the old roasting pit.

Blind Timi broke into a chant of the old voyages of the war canoe and of the Great Tronk. His old voice rose and fell like the surf and he sang in the rhythm of the paddlers. The people of Dwarpu twisted fern leaves into head dresses and their feet stamped out the old war dance. The sick husband of the broom woman beat on a hollow log with an arangat's foot. All night the dancing and the chants went on and the sound filled up the gorge as far as the cataract. The smell of wood smoke and burned flesh reached the niche where the Great Tronk lay in his hollow log.

At daylight the people of Dwarpu cut away the vines from around the Great Tronk's old war canoe and they dragged it from the cliff overhang and down to the sea. They nailed pieces of tin from empty food cans over the rotten places and they filled the canoe with dried arangat meat and ander fruit.

The two sons with their hunting spears sat amidships and blind Timi huddled on a pile of ander fruit. The broom woman and her husband sat on the narrow thwarts, their paddles across their laps. Findar's wife, Atris, sat in the stern with the steering paddle, her hair knotted tight on her head.

Findar sat in the bow, facing the open sea with the thunder trumpet on his lap.

Under the high bow, in place of the war bird, the shaggy, toothless head of Pickering was nailed fast, his wide, staring eyes looking straight ahead to lead them to the island called Earth.



Three Hearts and Three Lions

by POUL ANDERSON

(Second of Two Parts)

SYNOPSIS: "Impossible" has become an unscientific word. Improbable as some of them may be, there are an infinite number of possibilities. Most of us lead lives restricted to the order of things which the man in the street (but not the mathematician or the metaphysician) considers the only system of possibilities; but in 1943 Holger Carlsen abruptly found himself in a different order. Up till then he'd led a conventional enough life as a Danish engineer studying in America, becoming less conventional when he returned to Denmark to work in the anti-Nazi Underground. When he was engaged in a pitched battle by the seashore to effect the escape of a key Danish anti-fascist, his world suddenly exploded, and he awoke elsewhere and elsewhen, alone in a forest with a splendid black stallion named Papillon and an accoutrement of armor including a shield bearing the device of three hearts and three lions. He was to learn that he had traveled neither into the past nor into fiction, but into a very real otherworld which bore a curious resemblance to that of the Carolingian romances — the stories of King Charlemagne and Roland and the other paladins. He had arrived at an all-important crux in the history of this world, a point at which the dark forces of Chaos (as represented by Faerie and the Middle World and the enchantress Morgan le Fay) threatened to overwhelm the world of Law, defended by Christendie and Islam. And in some manner the knight of three hearts and three lions was the key figure in this battle.

Holger's first contact in this strange world was with a double-dealing hag who betrayed him into an ambush of Duke Alfric of Faerie, from which he barely escaped with the aid of the gruff and sturdy woods-dwarf Hugi and the swan-may Alianora, a sort of were-swan who is also a captivating human girl. Now the forces of Faerie, aided by the powerful Morgan le Fay whom Alfric has summoned from Avalon, are in terrifying pursuit of Holger, Alianora and Hugi. Alianora has suggested that they seek the counsel of a

small-time magician named Martinus Trismegistus, whom they are trying to reach before the next Faerie attack.

Holger has become convinced that he must somehow be, at the same time, both himself, the plain Danish engineer, and some great hero of Christendie. But who? What are the great deeds that are expected of him? Why does the casual mention of a sword named Cortana stir such deep memories within him? Who is the mysterious and as yet unseen Saracen who is everywhere reported as seeking the knight of the hearts and lions? And why is Holger, who has never had such trouble before, suddenly surrounded by adoring women? He has enjoyed the person (and been almost destroyed by the treachery) of the damsel Meriven of Faerie; the chaste and independent Alianora has fallen in love for the first time in her life; and even the sensuous and dangerous Morgan le Fay seems to desire him as a lover . . . and to believe that they have been lovers before. As Holger is trying to straighten out his tangled emotions, he rounds a clump of trees in the forest and finds Morgan herself waiting for him.

THE ENCHANTRESS CAME forward, dazzling in the filtered gold light. Her lips were smiling, full and coral-red, and the long black hair flowed back from a face of wonder, and a snowy dress clung to an opulently undulant figure. She did not speak so much as sing. "Greeting, Holger."

He stood with his heart thumping in his chest, hardly able to move. Morgan took his hands and smiled at him. She was tall, she didn't have to look far up. "'Tis been a weary time you were away," she murmured. "I have been lonely for you."

"For me — *me*?" His voice broke in an idiotic squeak.

"Aye, aye. Have you forgotten that too?" She called him "thou," making it a caress. "Yes, there was a darkness laid on you. You have been long away."

"Bu-bu-bu-but —"

She laughed and stroked his cheek. "Ah, your poor face! Few men could have stood up to the firedrake as you did. Let me make it well." Her hands moved over the blisters, and he felt them vanish. "There, now, are you more comfortable?"

As a matter of fact, he wasn't. He was perspiring, and the cloak seemed too tight around his neck.

"I see you've picked up new habits in the other world." She took the pipe from his slack mouth, shook it out, and put it into the pouch at

his belt. Her hand slipped along his waist as she did. "Ah, naughty youth!"

He recovered some measure of sanity. Tall women had no business acting kittenish. "Look here," he croaked, "you were with Alfric, and he tried to kill me. What have I got to do with you?"

"What has any man to do with a maid who longs for him?" she breathed, sidling closer. Holger backed up till a tree stopped him.

"In truth," sighed Morgan, "I knew not who you were, Holger, so I aided Alfric all unwittingly. But when I found out, then did I haste me hither to find you."

He wiped sweat off his face. "That's a lie," he said harshly.

"Well, we of the gentler sex must be permitted a little fancifulness," she answered serenely. She reached up to stroke his forehead. "It is God's truth that I have come to win you back."

"Win me back to Chaos!" he blustered weakly.

"And why not? What is there about dull and stodgy Law that drives you to defend it? Why, Holger, my darling bear, you're but bulwarking loutish peasants and fat-gutted burghers, when the laughter and thunder and swirling stars of Chaos could be yours for the asking. When were you ever one for a safe and narrow life, locked in its own smugness, roofed with a sour gray sky and stinking of smoke, you who drove armies from the field? You could hurl suns and shape worlds if you chose!"

Her head was on his breast and her arms about his waist. "No-n-no!" he stuttered. "I don't trust —"

"Ah, lackaday! Is this the man who dwelt so long with me on Avalon? Have you forgotten that I gave you centuries of youth, and lordship, and love?" She looked up at him again with huge dark eyes. He tried to tell himself how corny her act was, and failed. "If you will not join with us, then at least do not fight against us. Return to Avalon, Holger! Come back with me to Avalon the fair!"

He knew, somewhere in his buckling mind, that she was sincere for a change. She wanted him out of the way in the coming struggle, but she also wanted him, period. *And why not?* he thought staggeringly. What did he owe to either side, in this universe that was not his? When Morgan le Fay was in his arms —

"All these long years," she whispered, "and now when we meet you have not even kissed me."

"That," he choked, "c-c-could be remedied."

It was rather like being in a soft cyclone. He couldn't think of anything else, there was no time or opportunity or wish.

"Ah-h-h," she whispered at last, her eyes still closed, "my lord, my lord, do it again. Do it forever."

He gathered her in. A flicker of white caught the edge of his eye. Turning, he saw Alianora, mounted on the unicorn and rounding the trees. "Holger," she was calling, "Holger, dear, where be ye — Oh!"

The unicorn reared, throwing Alianora to the grass, let out a thunderously indignant snort, and fled. The girl bounced up, glaring. "Now see wha' ye ha' done!" she wailed irrationally. "He'll ne'er come back!"

Slowly, Holger disentangled himself. Alianora burst into tears.

"Get that peasant wench out of here!" cried Morgan.

"'Tis no for me to run!" screeched Alianora, flaring up. "Foul witch that ye be, get awa' from him!"

The queen's black eyes narrowed dangerously. "If that beanpole betake herself not hence —" she muttered.

"Beanpole!" yelled Alianora. "Why, ye overstuffed fleshpot, I'll claw your popeyes out!"

"Little girls shouldn't cry," snarled Morgan. "They'll grow up even homelier than they are."

Alianora steadied herself and showed her teeth. "Better be a wee bit young than ha' my skin sag wi' eld."

"You have such a pretty skin," hissed Morgan. "I like that peeling effect."

"Tell me," said Alianora with elaborate admiration, "where did ye buy yon complexion?"

Holger crept aside, wondering how to get of this alive.

"I see you're a swan-may," said Morgan. "Have you laid any good eggs?"

"Nay. I canna cackle so shrill as some old hens."

Morgan flushed and began to make passes. "See how you like being a hen yourself!"

"Hey!" Holger leaped forward. His hand jumped, almost of its own will, and Morgan went rolling to the grass.

"None of that," he gasped.

The queen got slowly up. "So that is how it stands," she murmured.

"I guess it is," said Holger, wondering if he really meant it.

"Well, have it your way, then. We'll meet once more, my friend." Morgan laughed harshly and waved her hands. Suddenly she was gone. There was a small crack as air rushed back where she had been.

Alianora began to cry in earnest, leaning disconsolately against a tree. When Holger went up and laid a hand on her shoulder, she shook him off. "Go away," she whispered. "G-g-g-g-go off wi' your w-w-w-witch, sith she p-p-pleases ye so well — Uh-h-h-h —"

"Look here," said Holger helplessly. "It wasn't my fault. I didn't ask her to show up."

"I willna hearken, I tell ye. Go away."

Holger sighed. He had troubles enough without a hysterical female on his hands. He pulled her around, shook her, and said between his teeth: "I had nothing to do with this. Hear? Now will you come along with me like a grown-up human being, or must I drag you back?"

Alianora looked at him with wide eyes. Then she dropped her lashes. "I'll come wi' ye," she said meekly.

Holger got his pipe going again and strode moodily toward camp. Damn, damn, damn, and damn! Almost, there with Morgan le Fay, he had remembered that other life, almost it had come to him, only —

Well, too late now. From now on, she'd doubtless be his bitterest opponent. But it was probably a good thing that they'd been interrupted; he couldn't have held out against her blandishments very long.

And the hell of it was, he rather wished he hadn't. Who was it had that line about nothing being so futile as the memory of a temptation resisted?

Too late. He'd just have to carry on.

His buried memory shot a fact up into his conscious mind, and he knew why the unicorn had departed. Morgan le Fay must have been the last straw on its outraged sensibilities — or the last dozen straws. That made him chuckle, and he reached out to take Alianora's hand. They walked back to camp side by side.

XII

With only one mount, progress was slow, but Holger found the next several days pleasant. They drifted through hills and valleys and forests, holing up somewhere when it rained, pausing at lakes to fish and swim, now and then glimpsing the white shape of a nixie or a woods-fay or a griffin hot and golden against the sun. And the Middle Worlders let them alone.

To be sure, Alianora, though a fine and lovely girl, had some drawbacks as a traveling companion. Her forest friends would show up from time to time: a squirrel bearing an offering of fruits was all right, but it was disconcerting, to say the least, when a lion stalked into camp and laid a fresh-killed deer at her feet. That wasn't too bad, the change of diet was welcome; Holger was bothered more by her own attitude toward him. Damn it, he didn't want to compromise himself with her. It wouldn't be fair to either of them, when he meant to leave this world at the first chance. But she made it hard for him to remain a gentleman. She was so shyly and pathetically expecting him to take her.

He drew Hugi aside one evening. He'd just spent an hour kissing Alianora goodnight, and it had needed all his will-power — or won't-power — to

stop at that and pack her off to sleep. "Look," he said, "you see how it is between us."

"Aye, so I do," grinned the dwarf. "And a guid thing 'tis. She's been living too long amongst beasts and the wee folk."

"But — but — You warned me, before, to behave myself with her."

"That were afore I kenned ye well. Noo I think ye're a richt guid man for her. She and ye could reign o'er us in the woods, we'd be glad to ha' ye."

"Good grief!" Holger turned away. "You're no help at all."

"I been as helpfu' as could be," said Hugi in an injured tone. "Ye dinna know hoo oft I turned ma face, or wandered off into the woods, to leave ye two alone."

"That isn't what — Oh, never mind."

Holger lit his pipe and stared gloomily into the fire. He wasn't any Don Juan. It didn't make sense that one woman after another, in this world, should throw herself at him. Meriven the Pharisee and Morgan le Fay had had good practical reasons, but there'd been personal motives too; Alianora had quite simply fallen in love with him. Why? He had no illusions about his own attractiveness.

But, of course, that alter ego of his, that could be another story. He imagined that it showed in numberless subtle ways which transformed the total impression he made. What had he been like, this knight of the hearts and lions?

Well, let's see. Obviously a mighty warrior, which was what counted most in this world. A gusty, good-natured bruiser, not especially nimble-witted, but of likable manners. Something of an idealist, presumably: Morgan had spoken of his defending Law even if he stood to gain more from Chaos. He must have had a way with the ladies, or so wise a jade as she would hardly have taken him off to Avalon. And — And — That seemed to be about all he could figure out. Or remember?

Holger sighed.

They traveled on, and now they began to enter lands of men. The forest thinned out to copses and groves, and the rolling land was covered with small fields of grain and with pastures where shaggy little horses and cattle grazed. Peasants' wood and earth huts appeared, smoke rose against the sky. The people themselves came out to gape at the wanderers: women in long wadmal dresses, with a brood of half-naked children clustered about their knees; men in rough coats and legginged trousers, bearded and long-haired. They were all a blond, sturdy folk, with a stolid look about them. Holger noticed that the men always went armed, even when working in the fields — conditions on the marches were too uncertain. He would have

liked to stay with some of them, talk to them, but Alianora was unhappy at the idea of sleeping in their grimy homes, and they in turn regarded her and the dwarf with suspicion. To Holger they made clumsy bows.

It was toward evening when the party entered the town called Tarnberg. Alianora had said a magician lived there, a rather small practitioner but at least trustworthy. The town was hardly more than village, a few score thatched, rammed-earth buildings, with dogs and pigs and children playing in the unpaved streets, and a wooden church rather like a Norwegian stave kirk. The men were mostly out in the fields yet, and Papillon stepped through a chattering swarm of women and children, carrying all three travelers. Holger had covered his shield and wrapped a mantle about his face, no sense advertising himself; but Alianora was plainly known here, and they hailed her.

"Hoi, there, swan-may, what brings ye hither?"

"Who's yon knight wi' ye?"

"What's new in the woods, swan-may?"

"Know ye aught o' the hosting in Faerie?" An anxious voice, that.

"Is't a lord ye bring to ward us?"

They wound through the narrow, twisting streets until they came to a house with an overhanging second story. A signboard creaked above its door, and Holger found he could read the language too.

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"Hm," he said. "Looks like an enterprising fellow."

"Oh, indeed," said Alianora. "He is also Tarnberg's apothecary, dentist, scribe, dowser, and horse doctor."

Holger wasn't sure if he wanted to trust his secret, such as it was, to a small-town wizard. It might leave a wide-open trail for any enemy — No, what the devil, Alfric and Morgan could find him any time and the rest hardly mattered. And Alianora, on hearing his story, had recommended this Martinus rather highly.

The girl swung lithely down with a flash of long bare legs. Holger followed, looping Papillon's bridle to the hitching post. A few idlers lounged across the way, watching intently. "Keep an eye on him, Hugi," he said.

"Why, if any tried to steal this brute, I'd bewail 'em," answered the dwarf.

"Ja, that's what I'm afraid of," said Holger.

A bell jangled as he and Alianora entered the shop. It was a gloomy and

cavernous place, thick with dust. Shelves and tables held an incredible jackdaw's nest of bottles, flasks, mortars, alembics, huge leather-bound books, skulls, stuffed animals, and Lord knew what else. An owl on a perch hooted and flapped its wings, and a cat leaped from their path.

"Coming, coming, good sirs, one moment please." The voice was high and thin. Master Martinus trotted out from the rear of the shop, rubbing his hands together. He was a small man in a shabby black robe, with a round bald head and a wispy beard; his eyes blinked weakly at them, and he smiled effusively. "Ah, how do you do, how do you do? What can I do for you?" Peering closer: "Why, it's the little swan maiden. Come in, my dear, do come in."

"We've a task for ye, Martinus," said Alianora. "It may task ye in truth, but we've no got aught else to turn to."

"Well, well, well, I shall do what I can, my dear, and good sir. I shall do what I can. Excuse me." Martinus wiped the dust off a parchment hung on the wall, which was one way of drawing Holger's attention to it. It seemed to be a diploma from the University of Cipangu, declaring that whereas Martinus filius Holofii had met the standards set by the examining board, etc., etc., the degree of Magister was hereby conferred upon him in the field of Magic, with all its privileges and obligations, etc., etc.

"I—" Holger cleared his throat. "I'm afraid—" He was about say he had no money, his few Danish coins and bills weren't usable here, but Alianora dug an elbow in his ribs.

"There be frichtful secrets i' this yarn," she said for him. "'Tis no for a common hill-wizard to scorch his soul with." She gave the magician a dazzling smile; even Holger, standing on the fringes of it, felt a little sand-bagged. "So I brocht the knight hither to ye."

"And very wisely, my girl, very wisely, if I do say so myself. Come in, please, come into my office and we will talk it over." Martinus puttered ahead of them. His office proved to be a narrow cubicle no less grimy and cluttered. He dumped books from chairs, muttering something apologetic about his housekeeper, and piped aloud: "Wine! Bring wine for the guest!"

Holger lowered himself onto one of the chairs, which creaked alarmingly under his weight; Alianora poised on another, flickering her eyes about, not too happy at being penned in here. Martinus found a third seat, sat down, crossed his legs, and made a bridge of his fingers. "Now, good sir," he said briskly, "what seems to be your problem?"

"Well—" More and more, Holger felt he was on a wild goose chase. It didn't seem that this goat-bearded shopkeeper could even understand his story, let alone do anything about it. "Well, it began back when— Oh, hell. I'll have to explain first."

"Would you like a couch to lie on?" asked Martinus solicitously.

A bottle and three dirty goblets floated in through the door and landed on the table. "About time," grumbled the wizard. After a moment, when the invisible servant was presumably gone, he went on: "I declare, there is no decent help to be had these days. That sprite, now, he is quite impossible. Improbable, at least," he qualified. "Not like when I was a boy. And as for herbs, and graveyard mould, and powdered toad, why, they just don't put the sort of stuff into them they used to. And the prices — ! My dear sir, you'd scarce believe it, but only last Michaelmas —"

Alianora coughed. "Oh, pardon me," said Martinus. "I ramble. Bad habit. Must make a note not to ramble." He poured the wine and offered it around. It was drinkable. "Now do go on, good sir, and say what you will."

Holger sighed and launched into the same story he had told Alfric and Alianora. Surprisingly, Martinus' questions and comments were as shrewd and knowing as the Faerie duke's had been. When Holger came to his stay with Mother Gerd, the sorcerer shook his head. "I know of her," he said. "Not good. Not at all surprising you got into trouble. She traffics with black magic. It's these unlicensed practitioners who give the whole profession a bad name. But go on, young man."

At the end, Martinus pursed his lips. "A strange story," he said. "Yes, I think your supposition is right. You are the crux of a very large matter indeed."

Holger leaned forward, trembling a little. "Who am I?" he asked. "Who bears three hearts and three lions?"

"I'm afraid I don't know, Sir Holger. I suspect it is, or was, some great man in the western lands, France for example." Martinus looked pedantic. "You see, the world of Law, of man, is hemmed in with strangeness, it is like an island in the ocean of the Middle World. North of us live the giants, south of us fire-demons. Here we are close to the eastern edge of the world, and know well of such places as Faerie and Trollheim. But news travels slowly and thinly, so we have only vague, distorted rumors of the western realms, the Holy Empire or the Middle World kingdoms like Avalon, Lyonesse, and Huy Braseal. I could not say who this knight, who seems in some manner to be you yourself, might be; nor do I think the information is in my books.

"However —" he grew earnest, and some of his fussiness was lost — "I think I know what has happened. This western knight would have been too great a foe for Chaos to meet. Quite likely he was one of the Chosen of God, like Carl or Arthur or their greatest paladins. Therefore he had to be gotten out of the way. Morgan may have done that herself, by burying

his past life in him beyond the aid of any ordinary spell, turning him into a child, and projecting him into this other world, in hopes that he would not return until Chaos had won its battle. Why she did not merely kill him, I cannot say. Maybe she didn't have the heart to. Or perhaps, being one of the Chosen, he was shielded by a greater Power than hers. In any event, the same Power may have brought him back in the hour of man's need, and now the Middle World is using all its arts and strength to block him. Or you, as the case may be," he finished anticlimactically. "That is only a theory, my dear sir. Only a theory. But it does seem to fit the facts, if I do say so myself."

Holger hunched his shoulders. It was an eerie situation. He didn't like being a chess piece.

No, he wasn't that exactly. He was free. Too free, perhaps. He embodied a power he did not know of and could not handle. Oh, damn and blast! Why did this have to happen to *him*?

"Can you send me back?" he asked tautly.

Alianora drew a sharp breath, and then looked away. She'd known he wanted to return, thought Holger with a tinge of remorse, but she'd ignored the fact, lived in some kind of dream world, and now —

Martinus shook his head, gravely. "No, sir. I fear the task is too great for me. Quite likely too great for any mortal or Middle Worlder. It's a matter of the basic forces in creation, Law and Chaos, and you are being swept on the current of their struggle. You *are* part of the conflict."

He sighed. "Perhaps once, when I was young and gay and hopeful, I'd have tried. I'd attempt anything in those days. You've no idea what student pranks can be till you've seen a magicians' college. . . . Never mind. I can give you little help now, I fear, nor even much advice."

"But what should I do?" asked Holger helplessly. "Where should I go?"

"I know not. And yet — yet there is that bit about the sword Cortana. I've heard tales out of the West. It's told how a very holy man laid a mighty spell on Cortana, that it might bulwark Christendie now when Joyeuse and Durandal and Excalibur are gone. But later it was stolen away and buried in some far-distant place by the minions of — it may have been Morgan. You see, the Middle Worlders could not destroy it, but they hid it away lest it be used against them."

"Should I try to find this Cortana, then?"

"It's dangerous business, young man. Yet I see no other way for you, nothing else which can protect you long against your foes. Tell you what." Martinus tapped Holger's knee. "Tell you what I'll do. I'll use all my powers, and some have been kind enough to call 'em not inconsiderable, to try and find out who you are and where the sword is hidden. Its aura of

magic would make it visible to airy spirits such as I can summon. Yes, that seems the best thing."

"Thank ye," said Alianora. The prospect of danger didn't seem to bother her, in her relief that Holger wasn't going to be whisked away the next minute.

"You can stay in the tavern overnight," said Martinus. "Tell the landlord I sent you, and — *Hm*, no, I'd forgotten about that bill of his. Well, come back tomorrow. . . . Oh, yes. Perhaps you'd like a disguise against the Saracen? I have some good ones, very reasonably priced."

"The Saracen?" Holger gaped at him.

"What? Didn't I tell you? Bless my soul, so I didn't. Clean forgot. Getting absent-minded. Must whip up a memory-strengthening spell. Oh, yes, the Saracen you'd heard was looking for you. He's in town too."

XIII

A few passes and some foul-smelling fumes provided Holger with a new face. When he looked in a mirror, he saw a dark, rough-looking countenance; his yellow beard, already well-grown, had turned black and full, and his eyes were brown. Alianora sighed. "I liked ye better the other way," she said.

"If you wish to get rid of it, call on Belgor Melanchos and it will whiff away," said Martinus. "But beware of getting too close to strong magic. Inverse-square law, you know. The sword Cortana, for instance, will also dissolve it."

"Um — my horse," said Holger. "He's rather distinctive too —"

"Oh, my dear fellow!" sputtered Martinus.

"Please," purred Alianora, laying a hand on his arm.

"Oh, all right, all right. Bring him in. But mind he behaves himself."

Papillon almost filled the shop. He emerged as a big chestnut animal. While he was at it, Martinus transformed Holger's shield; the device now appeared as an uprooted tree. Holger thought of *Ivanhoe*. He himself, apparently because of being under the spell, could not see the changes except in a mirror; but Alianora swore they were there.

"Come back tomorrow," said the magician. "Not before noon. These countrymen keep ungodly hours."

As they went down the street, they passed the church, and Holger felt an impulse to go in and pray. Lord knew he needed help, all the help he could get. (More of the other knight? He must have been a pious man, in his fashion.) Holger suppressed the wish, not being sure if his disguise was proof against holy water.

It was dark by this time, and they groped through unlighted ways to

the inn. A plump, cheerful-looking man met them at the door. "Lodging for yourselves and the horse? Aye, my lord, I've a fine clean room which has even pillowed crowned heads."

"Two rooms," said Holger.

"Oh, I'll snark in the stable wi' the horse," said Hugi, grinning.

"We still want two rooms," said Holger.

Alianora leaned back against him. He caught the faint sweet fragrance of her hair. "Why so, dear lord?" she whispered. "We've slept side by side i' the glens."

"Yeah," he muttered. "But I don't trust myself any more."

"Mayhap I dinna want to trust ye," she smiled.

"I — I — Oh, hell! Two rooms!"

The landlord shrugged. When he thought no one was looking, he was seen to tap his forehead.

The rooms were small, with a straw tick and a washstand and nothing else, but Holger had slept in worse. He wondered what he would pay with. And come to think of it, the townsfolk would have noticed that he emerged from the shop with a new look. He'd just have to chance that gossip wouldn't reach the Saracen's ears till they were gone.

He shed his armor and changed clothes, but kept the sword by him. When he came out again to go down for supper, he met Alianora in the gloom of the hallway. He wasn't sorry it was too dark for her to see his expression. "Shall we go eat?" he asked lamely.

"Aye." Her voice was a little choked. Suddenly she clasped his hands. "Holger, what is't ye dinna like about me?"

"Nothing," he said. "I like you very much."

"But that I be a woods-runner, wild and unchristened? I could change that," she gulped. "I could learn to be a lady."

"I — Alianora — You know I'm trying to get back home. You know I've no real place in this world, in spite of all they say. I'll be leaving you sometime, forever. It would be hard on both of us if I took your heart with me, and you kept mine here."

"But if ye canna get back?" she whispered. "If ye have to stay here?"

"That — that — It would be another story."

"How I hope ye fail! And yet I shall strive to aid ye home, sith 'tis your wish." She turned from him, he could barely see how her head drooped.

He took her hand and they went downstairs.

The taproom was long and low, redly lit by a great fire. The landlord was setting out dishes, and a man was already seated at the bench by the one rude table. As Holger entered, he stood up with a shout. It sounded like "*Ozh* —" but he broke off as the Dane came into the light.

"I mistook you, fair sir," he bowed. "I thought you one whom I seek. Pray pardon, my lady and lord."

Holger studied him. This must be the Saracen. He was a medium tall fellow, slim and supple, dressed with studied elegance in a white Arabian-style costume trimmed with red and blue and gold. A scimitar hung at his sashed waist. The turbaned head was dark and narrow, curve-nosed, with a pointed black beard and gold rings in the ears. He moved with feline smoothness, and his tones were low and cultured, but he looked like a nasty customer in a fight.

"Peace on you," said Holger, trying to be polite. "May I present the lady Alianora de Forêt; I hight, um, Sir Roger of Czechoslovakia."

"Sheh — ko — Nay, I fear me I never heard of your demesne, good sir, but then I am from the far southwest and ignorant of these parts. Sir Carahue, once of India, humbly at your service." The Saracen bowed almost to the ground. "Will sup with me? 'Twould pleasure me to, ah —"

"Thank you, gracious knight," said Holger quickly. It was a relief to have someone else pick up the dinner check. He and Alianora seated themselves. The Saracen looked somewhat astonished at the girl's unconventional costume, but glanced delicately away.

He called for mulled wine, explaining smoothly: "As you doubtless know, Sir Roger, the Prophet has forbidden strong drink, yet al-Qur'an says nothing of liquor which has been treated; and I would not be so discourteous as not to drink your lady's health."

They had a friendly supper, chatting of inconsequentials. Afterward Alianora yawned and went to bed, the close air made her sleepy, but Holger and Carahue settled down to some serious guzzling. The Dane demurred at first, not liking to be carried all night, but the Saracen insisted on treating him.

"I joy in the company of gentlefolk who can turn a sestina as well as break a head," he declared, "and such are all too scarce in this uncouth land."

"Yes, it's hardly a good place to go knocking about in," said Holger cautiously. "Some great purpose must have brought you here."

"Ah, yes, I was seeking a man." Carahue's eyes were shrewd above the rim of his goblet. "Mayhap you've heard news of him? A big fellow, about your size, but yellow-haired. Most likely he'll be riding a black stallion and bearing arms either of an eagle, sable on argent, or of three hearts and three lions."

"Hmmm —" Holger rubbed his chin, trying hard to look calm. "It seems I've some recollection — What did you say his name was?"

"I didn't," said Carahue. "Let his name be what it will, if you will in-

dulge me in that whim. Truth is, he has many powerful enemies, who'd be swift to fall on him did word get abroad."

"Then you are a friend of his, sir?"

"Perhaps," said Carahue gently, "it were best that my own reasons be hid too. This much I will say: I knew him long ago, but he went into realms unknown and has returned but once since then, when *le beau pays de France* stood in danger. I myself returned to the true faith, which I had forsaken, after a holy imam saved me from shipwreck and restored my youth." He watched Holger steadily, as if to catch every flicker of reaction, but finding none went on in a conversational tone: "Then I withdrew, some centuries back, into an enchanted castle in Huy Braseal, where time was not but a most fair damsel was. . . ." He sighed dreamily. "A year or two ago, with the help of her arts magical, I learned that here in the eastern lands was rising a whirlwind, and that O — this knight would be drawn back by force of it from strange realms to which he had been exiled. So I made my way hither to find him, but God has not willed it so and now I have decided to return home. My own domains will have need of me if the whirlwind breaks."

Holger scowled. He had a notion Carahue was telling the truth, as far as he went. The lean dark face was damnably familiar; the unknown knight must have been well acquainted with the Saracen. But as friend or foe? Carahue had not committed himself on that point. The difference in religion made it likely that they were opponents, blood-enemies perhaps, and the Moslem might want him alive to kill personally.

He rather liked the Indian. But that didn't prove anything. Under the fantastic code of chivalry, men could sing each other's praises while carving out each other's livers.

"I would not seem overly curious, Sir Roger," said Carahue urbanely, "yet it seems passing strange that you too should be questing along this uneasy bourne. Tell me, if you will, where lies your Sheko — this home of yours?"

"Oh, somewhat south," mumbled Holger. "I made a — a vow. The swan maiden kindly agreed to help me fulfill it."

Carahue arched his brows. It was plain he didn't believe a word of that. But he merely smiled. "Come, good Sir Roger, shall we take pleasaunce with a song or two? Perchance you know a ballade or villanelle which would fall newly and sweetly on ears too long used to howling wolves and rainy winds."

They traded songs for some hours. Carahue was delighted with *Auld Lang Syne*. He and Holger sang it together when they helped each other, somewhat unsteadily, up the stairs and to bed.

XIV

Holger's head was thumping next noon when he made his bleary way to Martinus' shop, and Alianora was considerably silent. They left Papillon and Hugi at the inn, for the landlord had been giving them a suspicious look; he had probably had experience with guests who were long on nobility and short on cash.

The wizard beamed amiably at them. "Ah, I think you've looked into the flowing bowl once too often, my young friend," he chuckled with the offensively patronizing manner of the healthy toward the ill. "Eh, eh, boys will be boys, hey, my girl?" He picked up a bottle. "Now as it happens, I have here a very good and very reasonably priced specific for bilious humors, bunions, rheums, leprosy, and hangovers. Just toss it down. . . . There! That wasn't so bad, was it?"

The pick-me-up did, indeed, clear his head instantly. Holger thought that if only he could get the formula, and it worked in his world, his fortune was made. But Martinus was already on other subjects. His face was grave now.

"I could not learn your own identity, Sir Holger," he said. "There has been a geas laid on all beings who might aid a white magician. It suggests you are someone of real importance. . . .

"But I have raised the fleet spirits of air," he continued, "and even called in Ariel as consultant, and now I know where Cortana lies buried. It's not so far from here, as journeys go, but it's not a trip I'd like to make."

"Where, then?" asked Holger, his heart beginning to pump loudly. "Where is it?"

Martinus looked at Alianora. "Do you know the old church of St. Grimmin's in-the-Wold?" he asked.

She raised her hands a little. "I ha' heard tell on 't," she admitted. "But it's no got a fair name."

"Well, that's where the sword lies," said Martinus. "I imagine the Middle Worlders hid it here in the East to get it far from its rightful owner, and in St. Grimmin's to make it hard for him should he ever get on its track." He shook his big bald head. "I don't know if I'd recommend you to go there, young fellow."

"What is this place?" asked Holger.

"Oh, it was a church raised centuries ago, up in the wild hills to the north of here. There was some hope of using it as a center to convert the savage dwellers, and for a while it did have a congregation. Then a raiding chief swept down and murdered them all, and the church has been in ruin ever since. The chief, it is said, defiled it with a human sacrifice, so it's no longer

holy, but has become the bidding place of evil spirits and bad luck. No one goes near St. Grimmin's any more."

"Hm." Holger looked at the floor. He felt as if there were a weight on him. Martinus wasn't kidding. It would be a dangerous trip.

For a moment he wondered why the hell he should bother. Why did he want to go back? What was there in his own world that drew him so strongly? He had no really intimate friends, no special ties, nothing to gain by returning to its wars and miseries.

He looked at Alianora. A sunbeam straggling in a window touched her hair with fire. He'd never known a girl quite like her. If he chucked the whole meaningless quest and went off with her, he could just about write his own ticket. King of the woods, or he could doubtless carve himself a realm in human lands, or if he wanted civilized company he could go with her to the Empire — Damn it, in so many ways this world was a better and cleaner one than his. He wasn't even sure that the other world he sought *was* his: maybe he did really belong here, maybe his stay elsewhere had only been a short exile. It would be so easy to give in and —

And what? Chaos was still making ready to hurl itself across this land. He thought of Alianora's shuddering idea that if they won, the Pharisees might draw their own unhuman twilight across all the planet. He remembered some things Morgan had said, talk of heedless playing with worlds and suns, talk of men and their homes and hopes engulfed in roaring destruction. No, he couldn't rest. Somehow he was needed here. He *had* to get Cortana, and fight with it, or all that he loved about this universe might fall to ruin.

Afterward — well, there would be time afterward to decide whether he wanted to return home or not. To decide where his home really was.

He looked up. "I'll go there," he said.

"*We* will," said Alianora.

"As you wish." Martinus sighed. "And I pray for your fortune on that quest, Sir Holger. God be with you, God be with you, for I think you ride in behalf of us all."

He wiped his eyes with his sleeve, then looked up, beamed, and said: "Well, that seems to be that. Now about the bill, since you are going on a perilous journey, you would perhaps like to settle it now?"

"Um, uh, well," said Holger.

"We've no the brass now," said Alianora. "But if ye'll send me the bill later, I'll see 'tis paid."

"I'd say you have plenty of brass," declared Martinus, bridling. "Now, after all —!"

"Oh, come, dear old friend." Alianora smiled and took his hand. "Ye'd

no dun the same man who'd save the whole world, would ye? Thy, your runes be your own share in yon great quest. They'll sing your name for aye."

"That won't pay *my* creditors," protested Martinus.

"Ah, but is't no true that a noble deed is worth many riches?" Alianora stroked his cheek.

"Well," stammered Martinus, "there are words to that effect in Scripture, but —"

"Oh, my friend, thank ye! I knew ye'd agree! Thank ye!"

"But —" bleated Martinus. "But you can't go off without —"

"Nay, nay, no another word from ye. I wouldna think o' taking more help than ye've already gi'en. Farewell, dear Martinus." Alianora kissed him and, before he could recover, hustled Holger out of the shop.

Women! thought the Dane weakly.

Carahue was lounging about in the taproom when they got back. He rose and bowed. "Off so soon, my friends?" he murmured.

"I'm afraid so," said Holger. Catching the landlord's fishy eye, he added: "Maybe."

Carahue stroked his beard with a slim hand. "Might I ask which way you ride?"

"North, I guess. Into the hills."

"Ah, yes. Do you know, that is one part where I have not searched, for it seemed scarce likely that my man would appear there. Yet now I wonder if he might not indeed have done so." Carahue's black gaze rested inscrutably on Holger. "Good company shortens the miles, to say nothing of making them less dangerous. Perhaps we could travel together a part of the way?"

Alianora looked at Holger. *You know him*, said her eyes. *You must decide.*

The Dane hesitated. "It's only fair to warn you that we may meet enemies," he said. "We may run into black magic, even."

Carahue waved a negligent hand. "Your sword is straight and mine is curved," he answered, smiling. "So between them they ought to fit any shape of foe."

Hm — Holger still wasn't sure. He'd certainly not be sorry to add some strength to his party. At the same time, he knew this was no whim of the Saracen's. Carahue had reasons for wanting to go along.

Could he be an agent of Chaos? It was possible, but Holger's half-memory, which he was coming more and more to trust, said otherwise. He tried to put himself in the Indian's place: out hunting an important man for some important reason, failing, and encountering a stranger with a rather thin story. . . . Yes, memory said Carahue had that kind of mind, a sort

of penetrating need to know everything. It would seem possible to him that Sir Roger had some connection with the knight he sought, was perhaps aware of where he might be. In that case, the thing to do was string along with Sir Roger.

"I very much wish the favor of your company," said Carahue. "And of yours, most charming lady. So much do I wish it that if you will kindly agree, I shall insist on your being my guests as from last night. . . . No, no, protest not, I will hear of nothing less."

Holger and Alianora gave him a sharp look, which he returned blandly. He must be pretty damn sure they were broke, and laughing up his flowing sleeve.

Still, the prospect of leaving Tarnberg without having to fight the landlord was almost irresistible.

"Done!" said Holger suddenly, and stuck out his hand. Carahue took it. "Shall we swear comradeship for as long as we are together?"

"I swear it by Allah, the Compassionate, the Omnipotent, and by his Prophet, on whom be peace," said Carahue in a tone more lively than solemn.

"And I *in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti*." Holger felt it had been a good decision: Carahue would probably abide by the oath, and once Holger had Cortana in his hands the Saracen would hardly be a menace. He said impulsively: "Bare is a brotherless back."

Carahue started. Recovering himself, he asked slowly: "Where did you learn that?"

"Why, well, it just came to me. Why do you ask?"

"I knew a man once who used to say that. The man I seek, if truth be told." Carahue's eyes lay keenly on them for a moment before he turned. "Well, let's away."

He showed up again wearing a steel corselet, flaring at the shoulders and elaborately arabesqued, and a spiked helmet; his shield was a crescent and star, and his horse a slim white mare. When he learned that Alianora had no mount, nothing would do but he must buy one from the local dealer, and spend an hour talking down the price. It was a rangy dun gelding which looked like good horseflesh.

A rutted dirt road led north and they took it through fields and meadows. Carahue was entertaining company, with songs and jokes and somewhat risqué reminiscences. It wasn't till evening, when they were camped and Holger was lying in wait for sleep, that he realized how subtly the Indian had gotten their precise destination out of them.

Well, it didn't matter too much. Carahue still didn't know just why they were bound for St. Grimmin's. *But watch your tongue, boy.*

XV

Three days later, roads and fields and houses were behind them and they were again climbing into a land of forests and hills and swift rivers. This country rose more steeply than the eastern summits, and Alianora said they were in the foothills of the titanic Jötun range. "And beyond them is no but cold and dark and ice, lit by northern lights, for 'tis the home o' the giants."

They rode between huge glacier-scarred boulders and wind-gnawed crags, up and up the long slopes and over razorback ridges into gloomy ravines. The woods thinned out until they were only rare clumps of dwarfed, bent scrub; grass was sparse and stiff in the thin soil; it was chilly by day and cold by night, with scudding clouds across the pale sun and the bitterly brilliant stars. Often they had to ford brawling glacial streams which raged down in cataracts, it was all they and the horses could do to get over without being yanked away to drowning. Hugi, who rode with Holger, was the only one not to get his feet wet on such occasions; he climbed up on the man's helmet, shouting jovial nautical remarks like "Ship ahoy!" and "Belay the larboard oars!"—which got little appreciation. Carahue snuffled and sneezed and swore imaginatively at the weather—he denied that his land had climate—but he stuck with them. He carried a bow, and used it to provide most of their food.

"When I get home," he said, "I shall lie under orange blossoms in the sun, and there will be slave girls to play me music and drop grapes in my mouth. To keep fit, I shall take exercises: twice daily will I twiddle all my fingers. After a few months' rest, I will of course get bored and start out on a new knightly quest—let us say as far as the nearest coffee shop."

"Coffee," sighed Holger rapturously. He was even running low on Unrich's tobacco, or whatever it was.

It was slow trekking through this hard and barren land. Alianora was not sure of the way, and flew ahead to spy out their goal. When she was gone from sight, Carahue looked at Holger with unaccustomed sobriety. "Despite her taste in clothes," he said, "that is a girl whose like is rarely found."

"I know," nodded Holger.

"Forgive my impudence in asking, but she is not your leman, is she?"

"No."

"The more fool you," said Carahue.

Holger didn't feel like resenting the remark. It was probably true enough anyway.

"'Tis wha' I been telling him and telling him and telling him," rumbled

Hugi. "Yon knights be an eldritch breed. They'll cross the world to rescue a maiden, and then dinna know aught to do wi' her but take her home. 'Tis a wonder their sort ha' no died out erenow."

Alianora came back toward dusk. "I've seen the kirk," she said. "It lies another couple o' days hence." She frowned. "I saw also a party o' heathen tribesmen wending hitherward. I hope they've no us as mark. They eat human flesh."

"Ha, a sad end to a gallant knight, barbecued in his own armor," said Carahue. He grinned. "Though methinks Sir Roger and Hugi and I would prove tough steaks, nothing like your tender pretty limbs."

Alianora chuckled and blushed. Carahue took her hand. "Comes worst to worst," he said gravely, "you must fly and not heed us. The world can well spare our sort, but it would be a drab place indeed without you to light it."

This boy, thought Holger, is an operator. He tried to push down his jealousy. What claim did he have on Alianora?

Carahue proceeded to indite a roundelay to the girl, who looked confused but pleased. They rode on.

That night they pitched camp in a meadow which seemed too bare and desolate to rate the name. Their fire flickered up to paint blood on a looming stone that might once have been a pagan menhir. Beyond the streaming, wind-blown light was only a darkness noisy with a tumbling cold river. Holger had the fourth watch, in that deepness of night which lies before morning, and stood drawing his cloak tightly about him against the seeking wind, leaning on his sword and looking down at his companions.

Carahue slept like a cat, as quiet and easy as when he was awake. Hugi sprawled, snoring lustily. It was on Alianora that Holger's eyes rested most. She lay on her side, her long slim legs drawn up and hands clasped over the small young breasts; her face, seen through a tangle of hair, was childlike, blind with sleep, it had a strangely helpless look. When she stirred, the blanket slid off her, and Holger stooped to tuck it more securely. His lips brushed her cheek, and she smiled without waking.

He stood up again. There was a heaviness in him, and it was more for her than himself. If he had been snatched up by dark and irresistible powers, that was too bad, but he hated the thought of her being whirled along with him. But what could he do? What could he do?

"Holger."

He jerked around, lifting his sword and glaring into the night. There was nothing but the flowing murk, the talking of wind and water, the remote sighing of trees. Imagination —?

"Holger, do not call out. I wish only to speak with you."

Morgan le Fay came slowly into the firelight. It wavered, etching her redly against blackness and glimmering in her eyes. His throat dried up on him. "What do you want?" he husked.

She smiled. It was a lovely thing to watch. "Only to speak to you. Come out here with me."

"Nothing doing," he said. "You can come inside our circle if you want, but I'm not going out of it."

"You need have no fear," she told him. "All the Middle World powers are gone from here, save myself: they are all readying to strike and are not sparing time to harass you." She shrugged sinuously. "But be it as you wish."

He looked away from her, into night. "You can't talk me over," he said. This time he meant it. When she reached and touched him, it was just a woman's hand — an attractive woman, yes, but no more.

She sighed. "I perceive an older witchcraft than mine has ensorcelled you, Holger. Still, lackaday, 'twas joyous once and nothing can take that from me."

"You took *my* past from me," he said. "You made me into a child again and sent me out of my very universe. It's not your doing I've come back, it's something else which neither of us understands."

"So you know that much," she said. "Would you know more? I can return to you all you have forgotten, Holger."

"At what price?" he asked bleakly. "The same one you asked before?"

"I could offer more," she urged. "Your friends here, for instance: I could see to it that they prosper also. As it now stands, you're but leading them to destruction with you."

"How can I trust your word?"

"Let me restore your memory," she said. "Then you will remember those oaths which are binding on me."

He moved his eyes back to regard her. She stood serenely there, except for the wildly blowing dark hair, but he sensed the tautness in her, she was drawn wire-tense, close to breaking. Her nostrils dilated, and as he watched, her fists clenched slowly together.

And why should the greatest witch in the world fear him?

He pondered it, standing there in the windy night with sleep at his feet and blackness overhead. She had powers, yes, and she had used them against him; but he himself was the vessel of some other might, and there was that which said: "Thus far and no further." She had, he thought, already used as much witchcraft on him as could be used without — consequences. And, yes, perhaps that was why they had given up trying to kill him in Faerie, and sought to beguile him instead. If everything they used in the

Middle World was of magical origin, it would prove impotent against him.

Of course, to something which was not hexed up but was supernatural from the first — or to ordinary cold steel — he was still terribly mortal.

"In my world," he said wonderingly, "you are a myth. I never thought I would stand and fight a myth."

"It is not your world, Holger," she said. "In it you too are only a legend. This is your place, here with me."

He shook his head. "Both worlds are mine, I think," he answered. "Somehow I have a place in both."

Nevertheless, a subliminal excitement rose in him. He'd never thought of it — but he himself might belong to the Carolingian or the Arthurian cycle. Somewhere back in that other plane (and how far away it seemed from this night and this woman!), he might once have read of his own deeds.

But if so, he decided drearily, the forgetfulness had covered it. His name might be a household word at home, but it was gone from him. Part of Morgan's spell, no doubt: she didn't want him to know who he was, lest he use the powers latent in him, and the transition here would have blanked out all recollection of — of — three hearts and three lions.

"I think you like this world best," said Morgan. "Beware lest you blunder back into the other." She moved closer to him. "There is a great hosting in both worlds, and yes, you are the crux in both. If you go through with this crazy scheme, wielding magics you know nothing of, you will most likely fail and die, or you will perhaps succeed and rue it. But if you lay down your sword now, you can abide here, happy forever."

He looked grimly at her. "You wouldn't be trying so hard to persuade me if I didn't have a fair chance of succeeding," he replied. "You must know where I'm bound. You've done your best to trap me and cripple me, and will no doubt try to kill me next, but — well — I mean to keep going."

It wasn't what he really wanted to say. Something in him was crying for surcease, an end to this warring in the dark. He wanted to take Alianora and hide away with her, hide from all the worlds and all their senseless strife. But he couldn't help himself, something beyond his own will was driving him now.

Morgan looked at him for a long and silent moment. "There is fate in this," she said at last, heavily. "Yes, I see that Carahue has also returned, it is part of the pattern. But do not be sure that the Weaver will complete it."

Suddenly she leaned forward and kissed him, not hard but with a great tenderness. "Goodbye, Holger," she whispered. Turning, she walked back out of sight.

Holger stood shivering in the wind, not knowing if he should wake the

others and tell them. No, let them sleep. He didn't want to talk about it.

Something moved out there. A stone rattled underfoot, he heard a clinking and muttering. What —

Shadows, just on the edge of sight. Holger strained forward. A man came into view. He was big and gaunt, clad in a bearskin, and his shaggy fierce face was painted. In one hand he bore a spear.

The hillmen — the cannibals — Morgan must have raised them to stop him. "Wake up! Wake up, here they come!"

XVI

Hugi, Carahue, and Alianora bounded to their feet. The Saracen's blade snaked free as he sprang for his startled horse. "*Allah akbar!*"

"The pagans," cried Alianora, leaping to her own mount. The tribesmen whooped and plunged in. One of them thrust at her with his spear. Hugi dove between his legs, a small brown hurricane, and they went down together.

Holger was still afoot. He met the first one with his feet braced apart, his sword went up and came down and rang in cloven bone. As the body pitched against him, he threw it back, into the next man. A spear stabbed at him, grating off chain mail. He whirled, hacking out. Dim in the firelight, a face grinned at him with filed teeth. He struck it down. Arms closed around his neck. He kicked backward and trampled on the savage while he hewed at another.

Back to the stone! He sent a head leaping from its shoulders, slewed the blade around, and opened a naked belly. Beyond the inward-pressing bodies, he saw Carahue slashing and Papillon rearing and stamping. A hillman got under his guard and he saw a knife blade gleam. He threw up his left arm, taking the slash there, and hit with his fist.

An ax smote his helmet, and it was a thundercrack in his head. He struck blindly, catching something solid. The dripping blade whirled aloft again. As from immensely far off, he heard himself shouting. "God and St. George! God send the right!"

Blows crashed on his helmet and shoulders from either side. He struck low, cutting and hammering. A man on the ground stabbed at his thigh. He stepped on the armed hand. Another cannibal went lurching back from a blow of his fist. They drew away, snarling at him, and he glimpsed the fight beyond, his mounted friends in a whirlpool of attack, a seething heap that must be where Hugi struggled.

Alianora's horse went down, hamstrung and screaming. The white swan flew up, swooping down to peck at eyes. Carahue raged through the press, laughing as he fought. Then there was no time for Holger to watch or think,

hurled spears were thick around him. He charged forward, scything. Three men piled on his back and he went down under them. He felt a knife rake his cheek. Twisting and heaving, he rose over the tangle. His sword was still down there. He plucked the bodies off it and picked it up again.

Papillon reared monstrosly black, neighing as he fought. The stallion made his way to Holger and waited. Holger put his foot in the stirrup and sprang up. A savage rushed him, he kicked the fellow's teeth in. Bending, he got his shield on his arm and waded into battle.

Slash, hack, cut, trample! Hew, sword, hew!

Suddenly the hillmen were running. Holger drew rein, gasping air into lungs that seemed on fire. Bodies were strewn over the stony ground, some still moving and groaning. Carahue trotted over to him, teeth flashing white in his beard. The Saracen was painted with blood.

"Nobly, nobly!" he panted. "By the hand of the Prophet, Sir Roger, I thought there was only one man in the world who could fight like you!"

Alianora landed. Blood ran from her left arm. Holger felt a swift horrible fear, and leaped to the ground. "Are you hurt?" he cried. His voice grew shrill. "Are you hurt?"

"'Tis naught." She smiled at him with pale lips. "They winged me."

He looked anxiously at the wound. A nasty rip, but not too serious. His knees seemed to melt. Suddenly he kissed her. There was no other way to say what he felt.

"Ha, now, where's the little man?" asked Carahue. "Did he run?"

"Nay." It was only a whisper, the remnant of a bass growl. "Nay, I gave what I got."

Alianora shrieked and ran over to Hugi. He was lying on the ground, and blood was pulsing from his side. She bent over him, and he reached strengthless hands up to her.

"Hugi," she wept. "Hugi, Hugi, Hugi!"

"Nay, lass, dinna fash yersel," he mumbled. "Yon great galoons paid top price for mè."

Holger stooped above the little form where Alianora cradled it in her arms. The dwarf's face was wrinkled, like a rough carving in dark old wood. There was nothing he could do for the wound; it was too big for so small a frame.

Hugi patted Alianora's hand. "Nay, 'tis no ye wha' should be mournful," he sighed. "'Tis about 50 lasses o' ma own race. Yet 'tis ye who all o' us ha' loved."

Holger knelt and prayed. It seemed the right thing to do, here on this windy cold mountain where there was no tree for shelter and no blossoms to strew. He asked that there be gentleness for the soul of Hugi. And

when the dwarf was dead, Holger closed his eyes and signed him with the cross.

They hid the grave well. By then, dawn was breaking, thin and chill and gray behind flying clouds. After they had bound Alianora's arm, she went off by herself, and Holger turned to Carahue.

"This is my task," he said tonelessly. "It isn't right that anyone else should die in it."

The Saracen regarded him steadily. "Methinks 'tis the task of all free men," he answered. Then, practically: "This is a grievous loss for us, though. Not only the dwarf, but Alianora's horse; and she cannot fly till that wing — that arm heals."

Holger looked out over the tumbled gray land. "The hillmen may come back," he agreed. "Or what's worse — Look, Carahue, I may as well tell you that Morgan le Fay gathered those tribesmen. And now, if I'm not much mistaken, she's off to the Middle World to get their whole host and stop us."

"They travel fast, the Middle Worlders," said Carahue. "We'd best not stay to rest. But when we get to the church, what then?"

"Then my search is ended — perhaps — and it may be we'll be safe. Or it may not be. I don't know."

It was on Holger's tongue to tell Carahue the whole story, but the Saracen had already swung about and caught his horse. No time, no time.

Alianora came running back and sprang up behind him on Papillon. Her arms closed about his waist with a desperate tightness. As they rode from the meadow, she turned once to look back. "Goodbye, Hugi," she whispered. "Sleep well in the earth, my friend."

The horses trotted rapidly over the hills, across rattling scree and ringing stone and hard sallow grass. Now and then a raven flapped overhead, cawing into the wind. At a distance, Holger could see the cold green blink of glaciers, and he shivered in his armor.

When he explained the need for haste, Alianora was quiet a while, then asked slowly: "Wha' did she really say to ye, yon witch?"

"She — Nothing. She wanted me to give up trying."

"I think she hankered after more," said the girl. "She was your leman once, was she no?"

"Yes," said Holger dully.

"She could gi' ye a proud life."

"I told her — I told her I'd rather be with you," said Holger.

She put her hands on his shoulders and reached up to kiss his cheek. "Now we'll gabble no more o' that," she said firmly. "But if ever I catch ye pawing at some wench again, Holger, 'twill go ill with ye."

In spite of fear and grief and unsureness, Holger could not resist looking across at Carahue with a certain smugness. The Indian grinned wryly and shrugged.

On and on. They wouldn't dare stop tonight, Holger realized, even if night was the time of greatest danger. Among the enemy there were races which did not fear iron or silver or the great name of God. They would probably come riding after as soon as the sun was down, and immortal horses went like a gale.

Or if they get to the church before us, they'll steal the sword again. I do not know why that would be ruin for us, but so it is.

It was near noon when they emerged from a rocky defile and saw the hillmen once more. Then Holger reined in with a curse.

It was an army this time, there must be a thousand of them, loping down the mountainside. They were painted for war, and they carried weapons and moved with little barking cries. Lean and swift and armed they came, and when they saw the knights below them they let out a whoop.

"Back!" yelled Carahue. "Back, we'll have to flee!"

"We can't escape them," groaned Holger. "Men can run down horses. And we have to get to St. Grimmin's soon."

A flung spear clattered yards before him. What to do, what to do? He was still stiff and sore from the last battle, they were two men and a girl against a tribe, and —

"Holger!" cried Alianora. "Holger, what is't ye do?"

"Strike me a light," he gasped. "I can't work that damned flint and steel now. Light, quickly, girl!"

His fingers shook as he stuffed his pipe, and he inhaled raggedly. The nearest hillmen were horribly close, he saw eyes gleam, their mouths were open and he could hear the hoarse breathing of them. He wondered how Morgan had bribed or frightened them to this.

He filled his mouth and began to blow smoke.

The savages skidded to a halt. Holger fumed till his eyes smarted. God be praised, there was no wind just now! Slowly, then, he rode toward them. They wavered, their own eyes bulging.

Holger flapped his arms. "Boo!" he shouted.

In the next minute, they had panicked, and in the minute after that they were out of sight. The slope was littered with weapons they had dropped. Their screams drifted back for a long while.

Carahue was holding his sides, and the echoes yelled his laughter. "Genius!" he cried. "Sheer genius! Oh, Roger, I love you for this!"

Holger smiled shakily. It was another crib from literature — the *Con-*

necticut Yankee — but there was no reason to discuss that point. It was enough that it had worked.

"Let's get going," he said.

Carahue edged his mount closer. "I thought I heard the fair lady call you by a strange name," he remarked casually.

"Ye must ha' misheard," said Alianora.

"Well, then I did." The Indian gave them a peculiar look but returned to a position some yards off.

Sunset smoldered red over a gaunt waste of cliffs and peaks, stark against a sky like clotted blood. "We'll soon be out on the wold," said Alianora. "Twill be easier ganging."

"Helpful, if we have to travel in the dark," agreed Holger. He thought, not for the first time, that there was too much luck in this journey for coincidence. Fate — well, yes. Only his success was not predetermined. There were forces working on his side, but other forces opposed, and it looked very much as if the enemy was riding a crest.

Night came. The clouds had blown away, and the stars were cruelly bright overhead. They gave just enough light to see the upland wold as a dim shadow, everywhere around them. The horses stumbled, slithering over thick, tufted grass and striking fire from rocks. It went with maddening slowness.

Hours later, it must have been, Carahue pulled over close again. His armor was a vague sheen of metal, his face a nighted blur. "My mare is near falling with weariness," he said. "I think we'll make better speed if we rest a while."

Holger scowled, but it was good sense. Even Papillon was breathing hard. If they had to gallop in their present condition, the mounts might simply keel over.

"All right," he said reluctantly. "A short while."

They slid to the grass. The horses stood trembling. An enormous moon, almost full, was lifting over the mountains. Carahue stretched himself full length, sighing.

Holger was about to do likewise when he felt Alianora's gentle tug at his hand. He turned mutely and went off a ways with her.

Moonlight flowed over the wold, gray and shadow-barred, glittering on rime. It was utterly still here, under the high cold wheeling of the stars. The light washed down over Alianora, turning her into a quicksilver fay, sliding shadow and cool white light. Dewdrops glistened in her tangled locks, and there was moonlight in her eyes.

"We may no ha' a chance to talk again," she said, very quietly.

"Maybe not," he answered.

"I wanted but to say I love ye."

"And I love you —"

"Oh, my dearest —" She came to him, and he held her close.

"I've been a fool," he said, wishing he could find better words. "I didn't know what I wanted, I thought I could go off and forget you when this is done. I was wrong."

She forgave him with her hands and lips and eyes.

"If we come through this, somehow," he said, "we'll never be apart. This is where I belong, here with you."

There were tears on her face, they caught the moonlight, but she laughed, low and happy. "'Tis enough," she said.

He kissed her again.

Carahue's shout pulled them away. It flew back and forth between high boulders, harsh with urgency, ringing and dying away across that lake of moonlight. "Quickly, come quickly, I hear the huntsmen!"

XVII

Far and faint, at the very edge of hearing, the horns blew. They shrilled with the noise of wind and sea and great beating wings, a hawk-voice high in the mountains, and Holger knew that the Wild Hunt was out and after him.

He vaulted up on Papillon, raising Alianora behind him as the stallion burst into movement. Carahue was already a-gallop, his white mare ghostly in the streaming, unreal light. Hoofs began to ring and thunder, air roared past them, and they bent down to the long fleeing.

The moon was an argent dazzle in Holger's eyes. The wold slid by him, blackness underfoot, flying stones and hissing grass and a rattle of echoes like laughter among the crags. He felt the horse's muscles between his legs, stretching and swinging back, like hot steel, and he heard the heavy labor of the horse's breathing. His iron clashed on him, leather groaned, and ever the wind of his passage shouted in his ears.

High overhead were the stars, incredibly far, flashing and flashing in the huge black vault of heaven. The Milky Way rushed down a dim arch, spilling suns across the sky, and it was cold and still and watching. The moon swung higher, drenching the land, a shield of chill silver. Around the plateau, mountains lifted sword-sharp peaks that glistened with snow. And behind the horses was an immense darkness.

Gallop and gallop and gallop! Now Holger heard the wild horns closer, shrilling and screaming, he heard the boom of cloven air and the ring of metal and hoofs and the baying of immortal hounds. He leaned forward, swaying with the surge of Papillon's haste, one hand loose on the arched

neck and one clutched over Alianora's. Behind him grew the noise of wings.

Swiftly, swiftly, over the rime-cold world, under the hurrying moon, gallop, gallop, gallop. The horns were skirling in his head, vision blurred, he shook himself and spoke to his horse and strained to see his goal. There was only the moonlit plain and the ragged peaks beyond.

Carahue was lagging, his mare stumbled and he nearly fell from the saddle. He jerked her head up, harshly, and roweled her, and she sped in the wake of Papillon. Holger thought he could now hear the bounding feet of the nightmare dogs, and there was a crazed yelling all about him as of loosened gales.

He looked behind, but Alianora's blowing hair hid those who followed. He thought he saw metal flash, high in heaven. And was that the dry rattle of dead men's bones?

"Oh, hasten, hasten, best of horses! Oh, run, my Papillon, my comrade, run as never horse did ere now, for surely the world of man rides with us. Haste thee, haste thee, my darling, gallop for life and more than life, for we ride against striding Time, we ride against marching Chaos. Oh, God be with thee, Papillon, God strengthen thee to run!"

Loud and laughing, the horns shrilled through the winds, into his skull, and the hoofs and hounds and clashing bones drew near. Holger felt Papillon stumble. Almost, Alianora was torn loose. He hung to her wrist with a strength he had not thought he owned. She fell back against him, and again they rode.

Now, up ahead there, what was that, stark and staring against the sky? The church of St. Grimmin's — But the Wild Hunt roared about him, sweeping down in one great surge, he heard the shriek of huge winds and saw blackness before his eyes. "*Jesu Kriste*," he groaned, "if ever Thou didst help man, then help me now."

A wall loomed before them like a lifted hand. Papillon gathered himself and sprang. Holger felt a cold, such as he had never dreamed could be, strike into him. He thought he heard a wind whistling between his bones. Then the black stallion hit earth with a crash that slammed him almost from the saddle.

Carahue followed. His mare did not quite clear the wall, she hit it and fell back. The Indian leaped free, grasping the stones, hurling himself over to fall in the churchyard. Holger heard the mare cry out once, briefly and horribly, as the roaring and the darkness overwhelmed her.

The yard was wide, a place of tall grass and crumbling headstones all around the ruinous pile of the church. Holger bent over and pulled Carahue up in front of him. The Wild Hunt screamed beyond the wall. Somehow, it couldn't cross, but —

He heard the sound coming from the shadows behind the church. It was the sound of a horse moving among the graves, a horse old and lame and weary unto death, stumbling among the graves as it sought for him, and he whimpered in his throat and struck spurs into Papillon. For he knew that this was the Hell Horse, and whoso looks upon it shall die.

The stallion could not gallop, here among the headstones which reached up out of weeds like fingers to pull him down. He stepped between them, shaking, and the sound of the old lame horse grew louder, slipping and staggering as it moved through shadow to meet them.

Fog drifted in tendrils about the church of St. Grimmin's. The tower was fallen, the roof was gone, the windows gaped sightless. It was very still here, all at once. Slowly, slowly, feeling his way through the mists that rose to hide the tombstones, Papillon neared it.

The hoofs of the Hell Horse scrunched in ancient gravel. But now the church was before them, and Holger sprang down and took Alianora in his arms. "In there," he said. His throat was burned out, he could hardly whisper. "We're safe in there." He carried the girl up the time-gnawed steps.

"You too, my comrade," said Carahue gently, and took Papillon's bridle and led him inside.

They stood in what had been the nave, looking toward the altar. Moonlight poured over it, turning it to radiance. The crucifix was still there, high above the fallen chancel, and Holger could see Christ's face against the stars. He fell to his knees, and Alianora with him; and after a moment, Carahue joined them.

They heard the Hell Horse going away, its clapping, limping hoofbeats dragged wearily into silence. And the howl of the Wild Hunt died, there was only stillness and moonlight. As the fog blew away, Holger thought that the church was not dead, not defiled; it stood roofed with sky and walled with the living world, it stood as the sign of peace.

Slowly, he rose, and held Alianora to him. This, he knew, was the end of his search, and the knowing was somehow a pain in him. His eyes lay hungrily on her upturned face for a long time before he kissed her.

Carahue spoke very softly: "What have you come here to find?"

Holger didn't answer at once. He went up toward the altar. In front of it was a stone slab, and when he bent over that there was a remembered thrilling in him.

"This," he said. He slipped his sword blade under the stone and lifted. The slab was monstrously heavy, he felt the iron bending. "Help me!" he gasped. "Oh, help me!"

Carahue knelt and got a purchase on the stone just as Holger's sword

broke. Together they turned it over. It fell on the floor with a huge hollow booming.

Alianora bent to touch Holger. "List!" she said. "'Tis an army sweeping nigh."

Holger lifted his head. Yes, the mighty rolling of hoofs, uncounted hoofs raging over the world, the sound of shrieking and of blown horns, the death-like rattle of arms. "It is the hosts of Chaos," he said. "All of them, riding forth to whelm the world of man."

He looked down into the narrow hole in the floor. Moonlight shone blue off the great blade which lay there, waiting.

"We have nothing to fear," he said. "In this sword is locked the charm against which they cannot stand. With this I can drive them back into the Middle World forever."

"Who be ye?" whispered Alianora. "Who is't I love?"

"I do not know," he said. "But I shall know soon."

For a moment more he waited. There was a power in him, but it was something beyond happiness, beyond man and man's hopes and dreams and loves. He dared not lift the glaive.

He looked up to the figure on the cross. Bending, he took the sword Cortana in his hand.

"I know that blade," breathed Carahue. "I gave it to you once."

Holger felt his mask dissolve, and his memories returned and he knew himself.

They gathered around him, Alianora in his arms, Carahue taking his hand, Papillon's nose gentle against his cheek. He looked at them for a long while. "Whatever comes," he said, "whatever happens to me, know that you will return safe and that you will always bear my love."

"I sought you, comrade," said Carahue. "I sought you, Ogier."

"I love ye, Holger," whispered Alianora.

Holger Danske, whom the old Frankish chronicles know as *Ogier le Danois*, mounted into the saddle. And this was the prince of Denmark who in his cradle was given strength and luck and love by such of Faerie as wish man well. He it was who came to serve Carl the Great and rose to be among the finest of his knights, the defender of Christendie and mankind. He it was who smote Carahue of India in battle, and became his friend, and wandered far with him. He it was whom Morgan le Fay held dear; and when he grew old, she bore him to Avalon and gave him back his youth. There he dwelt until the Saracens again menaced France, a hundred years later, and thence he sallied forth to conquer them anew. Then in the hour of his triumph he was carried away from mortal men.

And some say that he waits in timeless Avalon until France the fair is in

danger, and some say he sleeps beneath Kronborg Castle and rises in the hour of Denmark's need, but none remember that he is and has always been only a man, with the humble needs and loves of a man; to all, he is merely the Defender, and they think not that he has longings of his own.

He rode out on the wold, and it was as if dawn rode with him.

I had a letter from Holger Carlsen right after the war, just to say he'd come through it alive, but after that I didn't hear from him for two years. Then one day, without warning, he showed up in my office.

I thought he'd changed a lot, grown quieter and much older-looking, but put it down to whatever experiences he had had as an undergrounder. After the usual talk, catching up on all the lost years, he explained that he'd gotten a job over here. "Just a money earner," he said. "What I really want to do is haunt your bookstores. I've picked up things in London and Paris and Rome, but it isn't enough yet. I don't have all I need."

"What on earth are you up to?" I asked.

He laughed, rather harshly. "Some other time," he answered.

The other time wasn't long about coming, though. I imagine he wanted a sympathetic ear pretty badly. In spite of having joined the Catholic Church with its confessional, he needed to tell the whole thing, as it had been for him. "Not that I expect you to believe a word of it," he said, over beer and sandwiches one midnight in my apartment.

He finished in the darkness before morning, when the streets were empty and hollow beneath us and the city's lights were muted enough for us to see the stars. Then he poured himself more beer and stared at it for a long while before drinking.

"And how did you get back?" I asked, quietly so as not to jar him. He looked like a sleepwalker.

"Suddenly I *was* back," he said. "I rode out and scattered the hosts of Chaos, driving them before me, and somehow it seemed as if I were also fighting on that beach, in another night and another world. And then I was. There I stood in armor, with bullets yelping around me and Cortana still in my hand. And I rushed forward and killed the Germans. When I had finished, the sword was gone, slipped back to its own world; but I was still here."

He smiled at something I couldn't see. "Those two worlds — and many more, for all I know — are in some way the same. The same fight was being waged: here it was the Nazis and there it was the Middle World, but it was Chaos against Law, something old and wild and blind against man and the works of man. And in both worlds it was the time of need for Denmark and France, so Ogier came forth in both of them.

"I don't know just why that man in the boat was so important. Maybe it was his knowledge, maybe it was something he could do. I only know he *had* to escape. And Holger Danske rose to see that he did. I was — weeks — gone in that Carolingian world, and came back to the same minute in this. Time is a funny thing."

"And then what happened?" I asked.

He chuckled. "Devil a time I had explaining how I came to be wearing armor. But we were in too much of a hurry for explanations, and went our separate ways. Since then I've been plain Holger Carlsen, no super-human powers, no great destiny, just the memory of a life which began in Carl's day." He shrugged. "As I said, the spell laid on Holger Danske the Defender drew me back here, but once the job was done, the crisis past in both worlds, there was no special reason for me to be in one rather than the other. So that great impersonal power which preserves the balance of the universes simply left me here."

He looked wearily at me. "Of course," he said. "I know what you're thinking. Systematic delusions. But thanks for listening."

"I'm not quite sure what to think," I answered. "But tell me, why are you hunting books?"

"Old books," he said. "Grimoires. Treatises on magic. And new books. The latest mathematical speculations on chance and randomness and alternate possibilities. Morgan sent me here once and —" his fist crashed down on the table — "and I'll find the way to get back!"

I haven't seen or heard from him for a long time now. Sometimes I wonder if he did return to his Alianora — I hope he did.

But meanwhile new storms are rising. It may be that we shall need Holger Danske again.

The Naming of Names

When they settled the night-side of Mercury,
It was May, and they called the dome *Mayfair*;
But the colonists soon had rechristened it *June*,
Because what is so rare as a day there?

Stories of time travel usually concern the traveler, his problems and confusions in a strange future world. But he may very well bring confusion into that world; and a girl going prosaically about her routine future job may find that the intrusion of a man from 1953 poses problems she never needed to solve before. Kay Rogers has created, in economic but telling detail, a complete future civilization — and in so doing has invented one of the most memorable heroines we've yet met in science fiction.

Letter to a Tiger

by KAY ROGERS

17 August 2379
U. S. Preserve C6-935
Russell, Pa.

Dear Pittsburgh:

I know this is a surprise and you're not the type man to like that. But I simply must thank you; otherwise, I'm sure I wouldn't be writing.

Because you sent me that Kohler, I know you remember what happened at our convention last month. Though I'd completely forgotten it until the timetrapped arrived, with your sarcastic directions.

They were no more justified than . . . well, than your actions at the convention (when you were surprised; I guess that explains the production you put on). It was my first one; convention, that is. Just because I mentioned the Chastity Code and I *was* just in from the country, as you taunted — I thought it was practiced. And if it isn't, except on paper, well, I'll never be a willing millie. Like your blonde friend. It simply fractured her when you said I must be a snow tiger. Oh, I don't doubt it was very funny.

But I'd absolutely forgotten it until the Kohler-type trap arrived. Where *did* you get it; how many guys named Joe do you know? If I were really such a priss, you and your low friends would be on Report right now.

Of course, I didn't. That's because I'm a better sport than you. For instance, you never dreamed I'd *use* the trap when you were smirking over your directions, including the 1940-50 setting you recommended.

There, you suggested, I'd find the hypocrisy about sex which I wished,

but it wouldn't do me any good. Because, you repeated, I'm a snow tiger!

Well, for my *own* information, I did use your old trap! What do you think of that, Pittsburgh?

I didn't know much about the Twentieth Century; no one does, because they didn't leave much. Oh, I'd heard the usual things, like the legend of the Fabulous Flynn. Did you think I'd trap the Flynn himself? I suppose you thought they were all of a piece with him. I don't believe he ever existed. Why? Ha! Let me tell you what your trap produced:

I set it up in a ravine near the lodge. I never let the tourists get that close, so it was safe enough. It had been there a week exactly from the evening I activated it, when I saw a man peering at the Preserve sign above the ravine.

I don't suppose Their Nibs ever thought the Anti-Fashion laws would interfere with their program against timers. But how can you recognize one until he opens his mouth? I didn't and, considering my purpose in fetching this one with the Kohler, got into difficulties with him at once.

He wasn't armed, so I took him for a death-wisher or some other hopeless sort of morb. There hadn't been a peep out of my wrist signaler and I was planning a few things to say to Carl of the gate lodge as I closed in on the sign reader.

He was so intent that I wondered if vandals had been active again. I read the sign myself:

ARE YOU FRUSTRATED?
AGGRESSION BUILDING UP?

TOUR U. S. PRESERVE C6-935! MATCH WITS WITH THE TIGER!

*REMEMBER: Compulsories must have prescriptions canceled
at the gate lodge. Failure to comply means Penalty 26!*

RELEASE KEEPS PEACE!
PREVENT DANGER!

There it was! Someone had blocked out the last word and put in the usual four-letter obscenity. Sometimes, I think it's a pity we have to observe the age-limit.

"Kids!" I said aloud in my irritation and the man whirled.

He was young and didn't look like a morb to me. I thought he was definitely good-looking even with the inefficient type glasses he affected.

I swung my rifle level with his stomach; he gave me a nervous look.

"I'm Professor Elwood Mortimer of Reedville College," he explained hastily. "If I'm trespassing, I'm extremely sorry."

"Trespassing?" I echoed blankly. "How could you, on a Preserve?"

But it's small profit to argue with a morb. I checked my rifle. "You aren't armed," I acknowledged his status. "Do you have any stipulations?" I hoped he didn't for the sake of the gate lodge disposal crew. How they hate those fancy Dan messes!

He looked so blank, I added, "I'm the local tiger, you know." Even from a morb, I expected a violent reaction to that information.

"You're a *tiger*?"

He peered dubiously at my tiger-patterned jerkin and pants. (So it isn't regulation; I get an added bang from it.)

"That's just for fun," I took time to explain. "Or are you staring because I'm a girl? That's common enough on the big industrial Preserves. Where do you come from, for Sike's sake?"

Not till then did I get it. "Did you come through the trap?" I demanded. "Did you walk into a thing that looked like a heat shimmer?"

"Why yes, I did," he admitted readily. "A rather odd thing, it was too. I slipped, I believe —"

"You're my timer!"

I moved closer to him and studied his face intently. I was quite close and I expected — poetry or something, I guess — but Professor Mortimer stumbled over the tufted grass putting distance between us.

That was my first inkling of the difficulties in store for me. The defensive way he folded his arms was another, though I didn't recognize it then.

"Young woman," he said pompously, "what's this nonsense about being a tiger? What is a Preserve? Is it" — delicate pause — "a sort of hospital?"

I scowled. A tiger of all people insane! But I remembered my plans and smoothed my voice and brow.

"That was a time trap you fell into," I said. "This is 2379."

He didn't want to believe it. "I'll prove it," I offered. "You come up to my lodge and I'll show you. Yes, I can show you books; you'd believe a publication date certainly."

So I got him into my lodge. And he believed finally, though he still didn't like it and wanted to return through the trap. Baffled as I was, I had to talk fast and convincingly.

First, I told him about the unreliability of the Kohlers. Which is true enough. I mentioned their need for servicing after use; the strict attitude of the government toward timers, even to offering rewards for their capture.

"But," he objected dazedly, "you called me *your* timer."

"Lots of people take advantage of a remote Preserve like this," I said smoothly. "They bootleg timers for their own purposes; it's got so practically every rural tiger feels entitled to one timer reward. Not," I added generously, "that I'd turn you in. I wouldn't take blood money. Maybe I

can service the trap in a few days. Meanwhile, you're welcome as my guest."

This brought up what he called propriety, and *that* had to be explained.

His eyes wandered to the psychorama on the wall — you know the Rex Thimblebee one; hastily he looked away. "Morbidity!" he murmured. There spoke the barbarian, I thought hopefully.

"How does one become a tiger?" He still handled the word with tongs.

"Oh," I said briskly, "you can tell if you're suited to it. At least, I could. And before I was out of the FEN. . . .

"F. N.," I said distinctly for his puzzled expression. "Federal Nursery. I was glad I knew; I haven't much confidence in the adaptability of the latents, whatever the Sikes say. *My* Sike said I was very nearly the clear type. That's very rare."

"Then a psychiatrist passed upon your fitness?"

"A good many never get so far; they're weeded out during Field Training." I hurried on lest he ask details about F. T.

"Of course, the real exam is practically the last thing. After that, you send the certificate to Washington with an application and your F. T. average; mine was 4.0 all the way. When they're approved, you give bond and get your commission."

I have mine framed over the psychorama and I showed it to him. Its archaic, obscure wording doesn't reveal anything; indeed, it seemed to reassure Professor Mortimer. When he turned to me, though the light reflected from his glasses and prevented reading his expression, his tone was warm and alive.

"Interesting; most interesting!" He took a step toward me; involuntarily, I retreated. "Fascinating!" the professor insisted and kept sort of gliding after me. His voice grew even warmer.

"Every culture has its . . . um . . . customs."

I nodded and stopped retreating. I'd had to anyway; he had me practically backed against a bookcase.

"Well," he continued ardently, "I trust you'll be patient with me — with what I'm going to request. That is, if it should, quite inadvertently, to be sure, violate any . . . um . . . taboos."

"Oh yes," I breathed eagerly. Though how could he know anything of the abused Tiger Chastity Code? "What is this request . . . which might violate a taboo?" His oblique approach charmed me.

"I suppose I'm a peculiar person," he confessed. "But I really believe one should obtain permission, don't you agree? It's the small courtesies which lend a graciousness to living. And in the present circumstances, I trust you won't think I'm presuming too far if I tell you frankly I am extremely anxious to examine —"

Examine! This is *romance*? I started nervously. Partly it was that word, but the professor had interrupted himself to extend a diffident hand. His smile deprecated his desire but his voice was very firm.

"I'd like to make myself very much at home in your library. Though of course, if that trap can be serviced soon without inconvenience to you, I'll be very grateful."

He had the bookcase open now. I felt my teeth showing. Not in the proper tiger style but in loutish gaping.

"So you like to read?"

"Oh yes, indeed. It's a pleasure to find that books have survived to your era."

At least, he'd forgotten his curiosity about the Preserves. With difficulty I got him away from the books, pleading the lateness of the hour. (I wanted to censor my library a bit before he worked his eager will upon it.)

Then I meditated. I had my timer and he had ideas all right.

But not, as you might think, because he was alone with me (who attracted the great Pittsburgh tiger of whom I'd heard before I met him). Which I'd figured a Twentieth Centurion would consider the goldenest of opportunities.

No, Professor Mortimer boils with passion to know our culture; he eyes my library through lustful eyes. . . .

And as the next two days passed, the only development I could notice was of a certain patience in myself. Which is a virtue for which I have no use.

I had heard no pretty speeches, sampled no bit of *romance*, that obsolete word for which I can't find a clear definition. Though the professor did find time to remark that I didn't really seem the type for a tiger. That was as close as he came to a compliment and I admit it wasn't very.

As usual, he'd had his nose in a book. (I'd removed certain technical volumes I thought he'd be happier not seeing.) I was pretending to read, while, for the millionth time, I tried to figure why this contemporary of the Fabulous Flynn so blindly assumed my library was the sole recreation offered by the lodge.

"Is this a game preserve?" he asked suddenly.

"What's a game preserve?" I countered. I knew he'd get curious about the workings of the Preserve. I was ready for him.

"No, we don't have them," I said after he'd explained. Cunningly, I added, "Not under that name."

Thank Sikel! Imagine saving animals in a special place so there'll always be a supply for men to vent their repressions upon!

"All our tensions are released through the Preserves," I said. "You see, we have a scientific government."

"Really?" For once, he was interested in me. "A truly scientific rule?"

"Yes," I confirmed. "Like it used to be a democracy. The scientists were forced into power. We don't have wars now." (It was just an everyday word to him.) "The Preserves take care of that. They're an anti-war measure."

He found this a wondrous piece of information and eagerly asked for details.

"You know Freud?" I asked dubiously. "Well, then you know he said aggression and power-lusts are basic drives in a competitive society. They had to be repressed; the tensions must have release. Wars used to do that. But when the Law of Periodicity — but that was Henderson's. You wouldn't know. Anyway, on our Preserves, the necessary release is individual, instead of en masse. It's such an important difference there hasn't been a major —"

"You mean to say you're a mass murderer?" Professor Mortimer interrupted, shocked to his curiously distant core. I could see he recalled the unfortunate circumstances of our meeting.

I laughed easily. "Like Jack the Ripper or Rex Thimblebee? Oh no! The tourists come, they're armed at the gate lodge and we shoot at each other. That's true. But it's only flash guns."

This was a weak point. I was afraid he'd realize there can be no true catharsis in such make-believe. But he swallowed it without blinking. He only eyed me curiously.

"You scarcely seem the type for a . . . um . . . tiger. One would imagine an Amazon."

Well, Pittsburgh, so it wasn't much of a compliment! I couldn't have been more pleased if I'd been chosen Tiger of the Year. It was progress, wasn't it?

Though much too slow. Because my next quota period was coming up and if Professor Mortimer found out the truth about the Preserves, I knew that paradoxical sensitivity you find in timers who predate the birth of the scientific age would keep him from ever getting to the point.

That was all I had in mind; getting him there. I meant to avoid the point itself. I've always understood the Twentieth Century was particularly rich in crazy suppressions and who could tell, it might actually be dangerous. Anyway, bringing him to the point was sufficient to prove my own. Then he could go back through the trap. Maybe that would leave him with a new complex, but with so many, what was one more?

I felt that Professor Mortimer was afraid of me. Not as a tiger, my lies had taken care of that, but simply as a female. He wasn't at ease with me. That meant he was unsure of himself.

So I'd build him up. Simple? Ha!

At the time, I thought how easy to unravel this half-primitive bundle of tensions and me so sane and well-balanced! How can you build up someone

who'd rather read? That's mixed up; I guess I have a grasshopper-type mind. Which has its advantages.

For after I'd dismissed the idea of locking the library or breaking my guest's glasses, I remembered a certain exhibit in our local museum. I was stupid not to think of it before. I'd heard of it when it had a certain notoriety a while ago; something about some kids who were duly disciplined. It might cause talk if I went down and examined it — sometimes I find it wearing that we have to be almost like that predawn king's wife, in some ways, at least. But Carl of the gate lodge was extremely anxious to do favors for me just then.

He'd been put on the local Report, though not by me, and had to attend the next Screening. He was sure to get a compulsory tour; hence he wanted to do me a favor first. I knew he'd find a way to get what I wanted.

I didn't ask him how. What I don't know, I can't report. I asked him jokingly if he'd looked at the exhibit because his manner struck me as odd. He denied it so stoutly I knew he had. The denial was the danger signal but I forgot it quickly.

I left Professor Mortimer at peace with his reading for once, and pored over the Twentieth Century magazine Carl brought. With the first glassed page I turned I realized how much help it would be.

Here were pictures of the young women to whom my guest was accustomed and presumably at ease with. I was puzzled by the numerous pictures which featured their harnessed breasts, thrust forward with abandon and insolence. Every female has always been so equipped and so what? It must be a piece of that hypocrisy I've heard mentioned. Or maybe, being before the days of the government nurseries — But these women didn't look *motherly* as the old term had it.

Anyway, it must have been a humiliating reminder to the men, and at the same time — What nightmares they must have had! That's why I don't believe in the Fabulous Flynn. He'd have to've been a skizzy.

There were fully clothed young women too in the magazine. They stood with legs akimbo, though not symmetrically. They held a rose or a bit of gauze and mused upon it deeply and sullenly.

Or they twined themselves about a disembodied column; were there so many ruins then? I expect so. Though later I discovered the real meaning of this pose. It was ritualistic, and — but I'll come to that later. Right then I just thought it was silly.

But if the professor was used to such things, I'd do my best to put him at his ease.

The costumes were simple enough. The basic pattern exposed nearly half the upper torso above a tight bodice, while the lower portions were covered

by totally unnecessary yards of fabric. Yet there *was* something about the effect.

I made the best sketch I could and took it to Skip in the village. She claims or just says, lest it indicate need for the tour, that long ago her family was one of the notorious fashion dictators. She is proud of it, but she has it under control and it isn't a major compensation.

I hadn't used my special fabric allotment this period so I didn't expect any trouble except maybe with the limitations of Skip's fabric bank. But she chose a thin, dark green stuff and even contrived sandals to match. They *did* look better than boots.

I looked amazingly like the pictures. But when I descended upon Professor Mortimer, what did he do — after he stopped sneezing?

"I'm awfully sorry," he sputtered. "But I've an allergy, you see. I'm afraid it's that plant you have there. Would you mind?"

I had firepinks in my hair too, but if he called the one I carried a plant? Grimly, I changed back to jerkin and trousers.

I'd have to slink around a column at him. Its ritualistic significance dawned on me. I remembered the professor had refused to swim with me in the pool back of the lodge. Not because it's paved with red tiles, though that bothered him, but because he said he had to have a certain costume.

I'd never heard they were so insistent upon ritual. Of course, that explained why he'd paid no attention to me in the way I wished. My costume was incorrect. And there was no column. As simple as that.

Well, I had the costume even if he hadn't seen it through his sneezes. The column was another matter. But when he saw us together, I was sure the effect of that subtle announcement would build him up and make him sure of himself.

It was so easy once I understood. In my utility room, I poked about until I found a plastic sheet. I don't know why my predecessor stored it; it's hopelessly obsolete now the pool has a force screen, but it was almost ideal for my purpose.

The cover was collapsible and folded into an approximation of the desired shape. Of course it was somewhat thick, and square instead of round, but it had to do.

I set it up in the library while Professor Mortimer was taking a walk, a habit which worried me in view of the quota opening. I could hardly explain the danger and contradict my tale of flash guns and I couldn't allow him out lest he see for himself. It's really odd timers are so sensitive; specially a Twentieth Centurian. So I'd wind up the affair tonight, I was sure of it, and get rid of him.

He didn't mention the column. I saw him eye it and I knew he under-

stood but remained silent lest he break my mood. I felt both pity and contempt. Because there wasn't really anything in store for him and his ego needed it so badly.

He didn't look up when I entered. At first, he always arose when I came into a room, until I asked him not to. He said it was courtesy but it seemed such a sign of alarm that I couldn't bear it.

I took my place by the column. I dared not actually lean upon it because I wasn't too sure of its balance. I twined lightly about it and looked past my arms at Professor Mortimer.

I had just settled the proper expression of sensual aloofness on my face — and just try that sometime, Pittsburgh — when he looked up.

He stared unbelievably. I knew he was overcome by the moment now it had arrived, but hardly had I congratulated myself, when he turned hastily back to his book. I saw him twitch nervously when the column creaked.

Imagine my bafflement! I tried the other side of the column, closer to the professor and he shot me an uneasy glance. He stopped reading and folded his arms.

That was indeed an ominous sign. In desperation, I thought to try the gambit of legs akimbo, not symmetrically, before the column. I never completed it.

A crack in the plastic caught that foolish skirt. For a moment I teetered, off balance. Then with a great clatter, both the column and I fell to the floor.

I wasn't hurt. I told Professor Mortimer so. He didn't believe me for he kept trying to pick me up. My first impulse was to twist free and tell him not to be a fool. But suddenly inspired, I relaxed against him and gave him a wavering smile.

It was the right thing to do. Professor Mortimer kissed me, and would have repeated it, but the signaler from the gate lodge had to buzz harshly just then.

Of course, I had to abandon my project and answer. It was an alert for an emergency compulsory in the morning. The sub-clerk was reporting it so I put a question and yes, it was Carl. He'd begun raving but, the clerk added to my relief, no one knew what he was saying. It had been tentatively diagnosed as occupational fatigue but as he was already on the Report, an immediate tour had been ordered.

How fortunate I'd finish with Professor Mortimer tonight! I turned back into the room and there he sat, with his arms folded in his favorite attitude of defense.

"I really beg your pardon," he said. "That was absolutely inexcusable."

There was more, about the trap, and how he'd felt this overcoming him for some time — this unpardonable act!

"What are you apologizing for?" I demanded. "For kissing me, you worm? Why do you think I played your silly games?"

He gave me a peculiar look but I'd had enough of his oddities. Right then, I felt like pitching him bodily into the trap. My conscience wouldn't allow that. I'd have to check the thing first. I couldn't do that until morning and only after disposing of Carl. (Of course, now there was no question about what to do with Carl.)

In the morning as I made preparations to sally forth, Professor Mortimer made a diffident approach.

"There is a tourist?" he asked.

I picked up my "flash gun" which I thought answer enough. He cleared his throat several times. It irritated me, it was so much like him, and I said brutally, "I have to go now. But you've initiative enough to find your breakfast, I suppose."

He got red. "There is something I must say."

But I really had to hurry and closed the door upon his mumbling dignity. Afterwards, I realized it was that dig about initiative. But then I was intent on Carl who has watched me work many times. What he didn't know, and I smiled to myself, is how the tourist's weapon is always much inferior to ours.

There's no sense telling *you* about the stalk. It ended with me on top of a small hill concealed in a hazel copse and Carl below lurking behind three large boulders which he thought concealed him. He hadn't seen me and there was time for a careful shot.

And then, who should struggle into sight around the sharply turned shoulder of the hill but Professor Mortimer. As he saw me, a silly, beaming smile lit his face and he came blundering on in spite of my frantic signaling.

Naturally, Carl spotted me. He blazed away and I had to nail him. And the professor kept on — even now, though I was fond of my confused guest, I have to smile at the sublime courage of his ignorance, walking into our crossfire — poor primitive!

But I've added up the evidence; his strange solemnity in stating he wished to tell me something, his following me and that fatuous smile when he saw me — oh, he'd come to the point all right! Be honest now, Pittsburgh; don't you agree?

I guess that's all. The gate lodge disposal crew hauled both Carl and Professor Mortimer away, marveling only slightly as to how a second tourist got in. They're checking the screens now and I'm sure they'll find a soft spot. I destroyed that insidious magazine which ruined Carl and I've put a spy-ray on my new clerk. Which latter fact I'll put in my report; they'll know that *my* Preserve isn't going to have any lapses — Carl being here when I came.

Do you want your Kohler back? It *is* illegal; besides —

You know, even dead, the professor still baffles me. What was it he *had* to say? I'm sure, but I can't know. I'd like to have heard it — him; out of curiosity, you know.

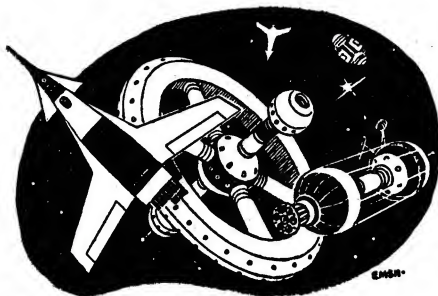
But I don't want to try the trap again. It'd catch a stranger. So let me know about it. Probably you and your Joe-squad can get a fabulous price for it from a Den. Those old tigers get duty-hungry; they'll bootleg tourists when they can.

Or is that just another luridity out of *Preserves Confidential*?

C

P.S. Congrats on being chosen Tiger of the Year! By the way, I wonder if you could recommend a really good psychoramic composer; he'd have to be quite imaginative. What I want is a re-creation of the Fabulous Flynn. So if you want to bother —

Caric



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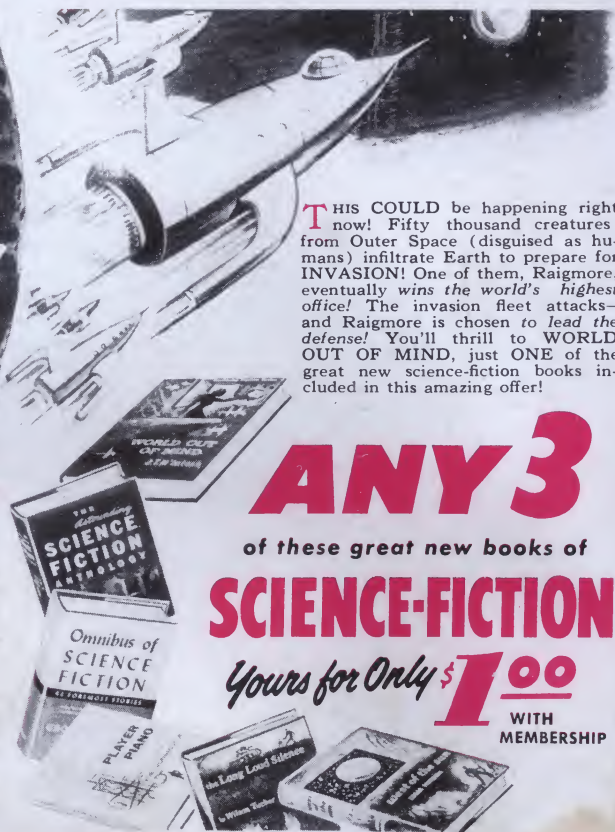
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